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# **The Righteousness of Works in the Theology of John Calvin**

**A Thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

by

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Supervised at London School of Theology

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# Abstract

Kevin Philip Emmert, “The Righteousness of Works in the Theology of John Calvin” (PhD Thesis, Middlesex University/London School of Theology, 2019).

This thesis explores John Calvin’s positive teaching on works-righteousness, demonstrating that his understanding of the matter is more complex than is often recognized. Most studies that relay Calvin’s notion of works-righteousness tend to rehearse his negative statements on the subject in order to establish his teaching on justification *sola fide*. This study shows that while Calvin denounces works-righteousness in some instances, he affirms it in others. Further, the main question of this study is not simply *whether* but *how* Calvin holds a positive notion of works-righteousness. This thesis demonstrates that Calvin affirms a righteousness according to works within the proper theological context, one in which a righteousness according to faith has already been established. This thesis also argues that Calvin taught a form of justification by works. Indeed, it shows that Calvin ascribes not only a positive role to good works in relation to divine acceptance, but also soteriological value to the good works of believers. This thesis does so by exploring Calvin’s theological anthropology, his understanding of divine-human activity, his teaching on the nature of good works, and his understanding of divine grace and benevolence. It also addresses current debates in Calvin scholarship by providing additional input for discussions on topics such as union with Christ, the relation between justification and sanctification, the relation between good works and divine acceptance, the role of good works in the Christian life, and the content of good works. All this is accomplished by analyzing not just Calvin’s *magnum opus*, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, but also his commentaries, theological treatises, catechisms, and sermons.

# Acknowledgments

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# List of Abbreviations

## Works of Calvin

<i>Antidote</i>	<i>Antidotes to the Council of Trent</i>
<i>BLW</i>	<i>Bondage and Liberation of the Will: A Defense of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius</i> . Translated by Graham I. Davies and edited by A.N.S. Lane. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996. Cited by page number, followed by <i>COR</i> reference.
<i>CO</i>	<i>Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia</i> . Edited by Wilhelm Baum, Edward Cunitz, and Edward Reuss. 59 volumes, <i>Corpus Reformatorum</i> volumes 29–87. Brunsvigae: A. Schwetschke and Son (M. Bruhn), 1863-1900. Cited by volume and column number.
<i>Comm.</i>	Commentary. All references to Calvin’s Old Testament commentaries are from the Calvin Translation Society edition, reprinted by Baker Book House; <i>Calvin’s Commentaries</i> . Volumes 1-15. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979. All references to Calvin’s New Testament commentaries are from <i>Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries</i> . 12 Volumes. Edited by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959-1972. Cited by Scripture reference, followed by <i>COR</i> or <i>CO</i> reference.
<i>COR</i>	<i>Ioannis Calvini opera omnia denuo recognita et adnotatione, critica instructa, notisque illustrate</i> . Edited by Brian G. Armstrong, et al. Genève: Librairie Droz, 1992–. Cited by series, volume, and page number.
<i>Inst.</i>	<i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> . 2 Volumes. Edited by John T. McNeill and translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960. In some cases, the Beveridge translation is used: <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> . Translated by Henry Beveridge, 1845. Reprint, Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008. Cited by book, chapter, and section, followed by <i>OS</i> reference. Dates of specific editions from which references are taken are provided in parentheses. Multiple dates separated by a comma indicate the reference is from multiple origins (e.g., 1536,1539); dates separated by a forward slash indicate that the reference is an altered/revised version of a previous edition (e.g., 1539/1536).
<i>Inst. 1536</i>	<i>Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1536 Edition</i> . Translated and annotated by Ford Lewis Battles. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986. Cited by page number, followed by <i>OS</i> reference.

<i>OS</i>	<i>Ioannis Calvinii opera selecta</i> . 5 Volumes. Edited by Peter Barth, Wilhelm Niesel, and Dora Scheuner. Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1926-1652. Cited by volume and page number.
<i>Reform</i>	<i>The Necessity of Reforming the Church</i>
<i>SC</i>	<i>Supplementa Calviana. Sermons inédits</i> . Edited by Erwin Mülhaupt, et al. 1936–. Cited by series and volume number, followed by page number.
<i>Serm. Deut.</i>	<i>Sermons on Deuteronomy</i> . Translated by Arthur Golding. London: Henry Middleton, 1583. Reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987. Cited by Scripture reference, with page number in parentheses.
<i>Serm. Gen.</i>	<i>Sermons on Genesis 1-20</i> . 2 Volumes. Translated by Rob Roy McGregor. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009. Cited by Scripture reference, with volume and page number in parentheses, followed by <i>SC</i> reference.
<i>Serm. Ten Com.</i>	<i>Sermons on the Ten Commandments</i> . Edited and translated by Benjamin W. Farley. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001. Cited by page number, followed by <i>CO</i> reference.
<i>Tracts</i>	<i>Tracts and Letters</i> . 7 Volumes. Translated by H. Beveridge (vols. 1-3), D. Constable (vols. 4-5), and M.R. Gilchrist (vols. 6-7). Edited by Jules Bonnet (vols. 4-7). Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009. Cited by volume and page number, followed by <i>OS</i> or <i>CO</i> reference.
<i>True Method</i>	<i>The True Method of Giving Peace and of Reforming the Church</i>

## Other Works

<i>Ap</i>	<i>Apology of the Augsburg Confession</i>
<i>ATJ</i>	<i>Ashland Theological Journal</i>
<i>BC</i>	<i>The Book of Concord</i> . Edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.
<i>B.Rom.</i>	Bucer, Martin. <i>Metaphrasis et Enarratio in Epist. D. Pauli Apostoli ad Romanos, in quibus singulatim Apostoli omnia cum argumenta, tum sententiae &amp; uerba, ad auctoritatem diuinae scripturae, fidem[que] Ecclesiae Catholicae tam priscae quàm praesentis, religiosè ac paulò fusius excutuntur</i> . Basel: Peter Perna, 1562.
<i>BSELK</i>	<i>Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche</i> . Edited by Irene Dingel. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014.

CCJC	<i>The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin</i> . Edited by Donald K. McKim. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
CH	<i>Church History</i>
CP	<i>Common Places of Martin Bucer</i> . Translated and edited by David F. Wright. Appleford, Abingdon, Berkshire, England: The Sutton Press, 1972.
CR	<i>Corpus Reformatorum</i> : Philip Melancthon, <i>Opera quae supersunt omnia</i> . Volumes 1-28. Edited by C.G. Bretschneider and H.E. Bindseil. Halle and Braunschweig: Schwetckhe, 1834-1860. Cited by volume and column number.  Huldreich Zwingli, <i>Sämtliche Werke</i> . Volumes 88-101. Edited by E. Egli and Georg Finsler. Berlin, Leipzig, and Zurich, 1904-. Cited by volume and column number.
CTT	Melancthon, Philipp. <i>The Chief Theological Topics: Loci Praecipui Theologici</i> 1559. Second English Edition. Translated by J.A.O. Preus. Saint Louis: Concordia, 2011. Cited by page number, followed by CR reference.
CUP	Cambridge University Press
ETL	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
ExAud	<i>Ex Auditu</i>
EQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
FH	<i>Fides et Historia</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IJST	<i>International Journal of Systematic Theology</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Church and State</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JTI	<i>Journal of Theological Interpretation</i>
LW	<i>Luther's Works</i> . American Edition. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman. 54 Volumes. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-1967. Cited by volume and page number, followed by WA reference.
MAJT/MJT	<i>Mid-America Journal of Theology</i>

Niemeyer	Niemeyer, H.A. <i>Collectio confessionum in ecclesiis reformatis publicatarum</i> . Lipsiae, 1840.
NPNF	<i>The Nicene Post Nicene Fathers: First Series</i> . 14 Volumes. Edited by Philip Schaff. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994. Cited by volume and page number.
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OUP	Oxford University Press
PRJ	<i>Puritan Reformed Journal</i>
PRTJ	<i>Protestant Reformed Theological Journal</i>
RC	<i>Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: 1523–1693</i> . 4 Volumes. Edited by James T. Dennison Jr. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008-2014. Cited by volume and page number.
Romans	Melanchthon, Philip. <i>Commentary on Romans</i> . Translated by Fred Kramer. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992. Cited by page number, followed by CR reference.
RTR	<i>The Reformed Theological Review</i>
SCJ	<i>The Sixteenth Century Journal</i>
TB	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
TRINJ	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
UCP	University of Chicago Press
VE	<i>Vox Evangelica</i>
WA	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe</i> . Weimar: Hermann Boehlau, 1883-1983. Cited by volume and page number.
WJKP	Westminster John Knox Press
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>



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# Introduction

Throughout Christian history, the relationship between faith and works has been understood in various and often divergent ways. Debate over their connection is as old as Christianity itself and continues to this day,<sup>1</sup> yet it reached a crescendo in the sixteenth century. With the Protestant Reformation, Western Christianity became divided over various matters regarding doctrine and practice, with major debate centering on whether faith and works, especially in relation to one's status as righteous, are compatible or antithetical. Protestants upheld the Bible as the ultimate authority for Christian theology and practice. Yet Scripture includes seemingly contradictory statements regarding faith and works, tensions that Protestants and Catholics understood in conflicting ways.<sup>2</sup> In the New Testament alone, we learn that “no human being will be justified in [God's] sight by deeds prescribed by the law” (Rom. 3:20, NRSV) and that “a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law” (3:28), yet also that “a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (Jas. 2:24) and that “faith without works is . . . dead” (2:26). This tension is compounded when one attempts to reconcile the perceived differences between the Old and New Testaments, particularly passages that promise life and blessing to keepers of law, on one hand, and those that speak of the limitations of the law and human inability, on the other. Scripture seems to prioritize works-righteousness in some instances yet faith-righteousness in others.

John Calvin (1509–1564) was acutely aware of these tensions. Against perceptions that he was a rigid systemetician whose theology was concerned primarily with establishing logical frameworks, scholarship in recent decades has become

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<sup>1</sup> Notable contemporary examples include discussions within New Testament and systematic studies surrounding the “New Perspective on Paul” (NPP) and Protestant-Catholic dialogue on justification. For resources showcasing multiple perspectives regarding the NPP debate, see Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (eds.), *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates?* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2005); and Bruce L. McCormack ed., *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006). For a helpful entry to recent Protestant-Catholic dialogues on justification, see Anthony N.S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Neither Protestantism nor Catholicism, however, were monolithic in their understandings of Scripture's teaching on faith and works. On the various sixteenth-century approaches to and understandings of faith and works, particularly the doctrine of justification, see Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd edition (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 208-357. David Fink, “*Divided by Faith: The Protestant Doctrine of Justification and the Confessionalization of Exegesis*,” PhD dissertation (Duke 2010), demonstrates the diverse Protestant understandings of justification during the sixteenth century. Cf. idem., “Was There a Reformation Doctrine of Justification?” *HTR* 103 (2010): 205-235.

increasingly appreciative of his exegetical work.<sup>3</sup> Calvin was not a “systematic” theologian in the contemporary sense.<sup>4</sup> While the *Institutio* is the most extensive expression of his thought, it is one of numerous types of writings that he composed, each of which reflects its unique character and possesses a distinct purpose.<sup>5</sup> Richard Muller has demonstrated that from 1539 on, Calvin’s *Institutio* became increasingly concerned with gathering *loci communes* and *disputationes dogmaticae* in an orderly manner, while the exegetical-theological conclusions of his commentaries, which were intended to be read alongside the *Institutio*, often lack systematic elaboration.<sup>6</sup> Donald McKim explains, “While it is true that Calvin presented Christian theology in a more organized or ‘systematic’ form than Luther, it is also true that there is much more to his theological understandings than is found within the pages of his *magnum opus*.”<sup>7</sup> Calvin wrote commentaries on the whole New Testament except 2 and 3 John, and Revelation. After publishing these, he wrote commentaries proper on Isaiah, Psalms, the Pentateuch, and Joshua, and his friends and supporters compiled and published his lectures on the remaining Old Testament prophetic books—though he never finished lecturing through

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<sup>3</sup> E.g., Raymond A. Blacketer, “Commentaries and Prefaces,” in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis, trans. Henry J. Baron, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 181-192; Richard Gamble, “Calvin as Theologian and Exegete,” *WTJ* 23 (1988): 178-194; Donald K. McKim, ed., *Calvin and the Bible* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006); T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: WJKP, 1993); idem., *Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries* (Louisville: WJKP, 1986); John L. Thompson, “Calvin as Biblical Interpreter,” in *CCJC*, 58-73; Randall C. Zachman, *Calvin as Teacher, Pastor, and Theologian: The Shape of His Writings and Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 103-130.

<sup>4</sup> Scholars debate the extent to which Calvin’s *Institutio* may be classified as “systematic.” E.g., Brian G. Armstrong, “*Duplex cognitio Dei*, Or? The Problem and Relation of Structure, Form, and Purpose in Calvin’s Theology,” in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Essays in Honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.*, eds. Elsie Anne McKee and Brian G. Armstrong (Louisville: WJKP, 1989), 135-153; idem., “The Nature and Structure of Calvin’s Thought According to the *Institutes*: Another Look,” in *John Calvin’s Institutes: His Magnum Opus*, ed. B. Van der Walt (Potchefstroom: Institute for Reformation Studies, 1986), 55-81; William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York: OUP, 1988), 5; Serene Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety* (Louisville: WJKP, 1995), 195-196; Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 101-108.

<sup>5</sup> See Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 69, 102-108, 140-145; Jean-François Gilmont, *John Calvin and the Printed Book*, trans. Karin Maag (Kirkville: Truman State University Press, 2005), 39-82.

<sup>6</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 108, 140. On the symbiotic relationship between Calvin’s *Institutio* and commentaries, see Elsie Anne McKee, “Exegesis, Theology, and Development in Calvin’s *Institutio*: A Methodological Suggestion,” in *Probing the Reformed Tradition*, 154-172. Cf. T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought* (Louisville: WJKP, 1995), 6-8, 16-17, 29.

<sup>7</sup> McKim, preface to *Calvin and the Bible*, xi.

Ezekiel before his death in May 1564.<sup>8</sup> As a preacher, he “mounted the pulpit of the churches of Geneva . . . more than four thousand times in order to explain the Bible from that place and apply it to the congregations.”<sup>9</sup> Calvin was a prolific commentator on Scripture, and his theological writings were driven by exegesis. Calvin, therefore, must be recognized as a biblical interpreter, or even as a “humanistic theologian”<sup>10</sup> who aimed to derive his doctrinal formulations from Scripture.

This study will show that Calvin was sensitive to Scripture’s dynamic teaching on faith and works. It may seem there is little new to contribute on the matter, yet this study will show that Calvin’s understanding of the relation between faith and works—or more specifically, the relation between *iustitia fidei* and *iustitia operum*—is more complex than is commonly recognized.

Calvin believed the Bible teaches clearly that human works are worthless and cannot make one righteous, yet he also admitted that certain passages concerning personal righteousness pose difficulties for the doctrine of justification *sola fide*.<sup>11</sup> Further, Calvin freely confessed, “Scripture shows that the good works of believers are *reasons* why the Lord benefits them” (all emphases added to Calvin’s works are mine unless otherwise noted).<sup>12</sup> Such a concession might seem to contradict the Protestant doctrine of justification *sola fide*. Yet such statements reflect that Calvin was devoted to understanding Scripture on its own terms. As Anthony Lane states, Calvin “was committed to listening to and accommodating even those passages which do not easily

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<sup>8</sup> See Parker, *Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries*, 13-34; Pete Wilcox, “Calvin as Commentator on the Prophets,” in *Calvin and the Bible*, 107-111.

<sup>9</sup> Wim Moehn, “Sermons,” in *Calvin Handbook*, 173. Cf. T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin’s Preaching* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Christoph Burger, “Calvin and the Humanists,” in *Calvin Handbook*, 142, says it is better to call Calvin a “*humanistic theologian* rather than a *humanist* who worked as a theologian.” Burger provides a brief, helpful survey of the debate regarding whether to categorize Calvin as a humanist. Jason Van Vliet, *Children of God: The Imago Dei in Calvin and His Context* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 131-166, compares Calvin to Pico della Mirandola, Desiderius Erasmus, and Jascque LeFèvre d’Étaples, and argues that it is helpful to distinguish between *particular humanism*, which refers to a set of academic and pedagogical methods, and *general humanism*, which refers to certain religious and philosophical beliefs. Calvin, Van Vliet argues, shares many of the theological and pedagogical methods that Renaissance humanists held, but utilized Scripture and the church fathers more, and adhered more consistently to a “historical-grammatical” manner of exegesis (164). He also argues that Calvin holds religious and philosophical views that do not always accord with general humanism.

<sup>11</sup> See *Comm.* Ezek. 18:14-17, *CO* 40:437; Stephen Coxhead, “John Calvin’s Interpretation of Works Righteousness in Ezekiel 18,” *WTJ* 70.2 (2008): 303,305,310.

<sup>12</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.21 (1539), *OS* 4:238.

fit into his theology.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, John Leith wrote, “[Calvin] generally refuses to push the meaning of the text to make it fit some particular theory of his own.”<sup>14</sup> Calvin believed not only that Scripture is a complex product of divine revelation, but also that finite, sinful humans have difficulty understanding its full meaning. As Edward A. Dowey Jr. explained, Calvin believed that “the simplest mind can know all that is necessary for saving faith and ethical living because the Bible is sufficiently clear, yet the most learned scholar can never fully understand all problematic passages or plumb the depths of all the mysteries because it is not absolutely clear.”<sup>15</sup> Moreover,

One of the most interesting and striking general features of Calvin’s work . . . arises with regard to the problems of the limited clarity of the revelation in Scripture, and the limited powers of comprehension of the believer. This feature is the predominance of single themes which stand out in their individual clarity, as over against numerous systematic inconsistencies that arise because the systematic interrelationship of the themes is relegated by Calvin to the status of incomprehensibility. Doctrines that are clear in themselves, but logically incompatible with one another, are placed side by side because Calvin finds them so in Scripture.<sup>16</sup>

While Calvin was certainly committed to expounding doctrines he found in Scripture, this study will show that he did not believe Scripture’s respective teachings on works-righteousness and faith-righteousness are necessarily incompatible. Although he recognized *seemingly* contradictory teachings in Scripture regarding the two, he ultimately believed that “Scripture may, without quibbling, be duly brought into agreement with itself”<sup>17</sup> because he believed in “the beautiful agreement of all the parts with one another.”<sup>18</sup>

Interpreters have become increasingly aware of Calvin’s efforts to reconcile perceived tensions between scriptures that speak of works-righteousness and faith-righteousness. Yet, as is the case for many topics in Calvin’s theology, divergent

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<sup>13</sup> Anthony N.S. Lane, “The Role of Scripture in Calvin’s Doctrine of Justification,” in *John Calvin and the Interpretation of Scripture: Calvin Studies X and XI, Papers Presented at the 10th and 11th Colloquiums of the Calvin Studies Society at Columbia Theological Seminary*, ed. Charles Raynal (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2006), 382.

<sup>14</sup> John H. Leith, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Louisville: WJKP, 1989), 59.

<sup>15</sup> Edward A. Dowey Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology*, 3rd edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 37.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Cf. Émile Doumergue, *Jean Calvin: les hommes et les choses de son temps*, 7 vols. (Lausanne: Georges Bridel, 1899-1927) 4:80, who states that Calvin believed that Scripture possesses “une clarté *suffisante*” but not “une clarté *absolue*.”

<sup>17</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.8 (1539), *OS* 4:261.

<sup>18</sup> *Inst.* 1.8.1 (1539), *OS* 3:72. Cf. H. Jackson Forstman, *Word and Spirit: Calvin’s Doctrine of Biblical Authority* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 59, regarding Calvin on reconciling “apparent divergencies in scripture.”

interpretations abound regarding his understanding of the precise relation of the two. Further, that Calvin held a positive notion of works-righteousness is lost on many interpreters.<sup>19</sup> This does not mean that most Calvin scholars have altogether neglected his understanding of works-righteousness. Nearly every discussion on Calvin's doctrine of justification explores his notion of works-righteousness to some degree. This is the most appropriate rubric under which to explore his teaching on works-righteousness, but scholars have tended to rehearse what he says *negatively* about the matter—that sinful humans cannot make and prove themselves righteous *coram Deo* on account of works—in order to relay his teaching on justification *sola fide*. After all, Calvin teaches that one is accounted righteous by God solely on account of Christ's perfect righteousness, which is apprehended by faith, not works. What is pleasing to and effective before God is *iustitia fidei* not *iustitia operum*.

This study will show that Calvin's understanding of works-righteousness is more complex than often recognized. Calvin held a positive notion of works-righteousness within the context where faith-righteousness is already established.<sup>20</sup> Before we proceed to our analyses of Calvin's writings, however, it is first necessary to give a detailed yet selective account of approaches to Calvin's theology and of recent investigations of his teaching on the relation between faith and works.

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<sup>19</sup> Only several short-length studies—journal articles and book chapters—have explored Calvin's positive statements regarding works-righteousness. E.g., Coxhead, "Works Righteousness," 303-316; idem., "John Calvin's Subordinate Doctrine of Justification by Works," *WTJ* 71.1 (2009): 1-19; Peter Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 176-193.

<sup>20</sup> Coxhead and Lillback demonstrate this in their studies, yet I will provide more extensive evidence.

# Chapter 1

## Calvin, the *Duplex Gratia*, and Works-Righteousness in Contemporary Scholarship<sup>1</sup>

Calvin understood works-righteousness not only in a negative sense, but also positively within the proper theological context. Interpreters often conclude that Calvin contrasts works-righteousness and faith-righteousness to show that justification is apprehended by faith alone and that one's entire soteriological experience is accomplished by divine grace as opposed to human merit. While this conclusion is true, the question is whether Calvin *always* sees works-righteousness and faith-righteousness as theologically incompatible. An affirmative answer is certainly influenced by Calvin's own statements, since he often uses works-righteousness as a foil for faith-righteousness. Yet such a conclusion is also likely shaped by particular approaches to Calvin's theology. This chapter will focus on general and specific interpretations of Calvin's theology with the goal of highlighting themes and questions that we will explore in later chapters. One particular question is whether, and to what extent, Calvin successfully relates seemingly incompatible ideas such as justification and sanctification, faith and works, and, most importantly for this study, faith-righteousness and works-righteousness. Before analyzing relevant interpretations regarding these specific issues, however, it will be helpful to explore approaches to Calvin's theology in general.

### 1.1. General Approaches to Calvin's Theology

David Wright aptly remarked, "No one who labored for almost a quarter of a century over what we know as the *Institutes* can be regarded as less than systematic, at least in intention."<sup>2</sup> With his *magnum opus*, Calvin labored to bear witness to all Scripture and

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Niesel, John Leith, Richard Muller, Cornelis Venema, William Evans, and Mark Garcia have masterfully summarized and analyzed the most notable approaches to Calvin's theology—with some focusing on noteworthy approaches to his soteriology—within the past two centuries. My literature review builds upon and concentrates their treatments to the end of highlighting issues raised therein that pertain to this present study. See Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 9-21; Leith, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 23-35; Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1986), 1-13; Cornelis P. Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ: The "Twofold Grace of God" and the Interpretation of Calvin's Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 14-30; William B. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation: Union with Christ in American Reformed Theology* (Eugene: Paternoster and Wipf & Stock, 2008), 8-14; Mark A. Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 11-26.

<sup>2</sup> David F. Wright, preface to Garcia, *Life in Christ*, xv.



claimed he had “embraced the sum of religion in all its parts.”<sup>3</sup> While not producing a systematic theology in the modern sense, Calvin intended to develop a theological work that organized the dominant teachings of Scripture within a logical framework.<sup>4</sup> This endeavor was not unique to Calvin. Parallels can be drawn between Calvin’s *Institutio* and the works of Reformers such as Philip Melanchthon, Wolfgang Musculus, Andreas Hyperius, and Peter Martyr Vermigli, all of whom sought to draw out, organize, and expound *loci communes* that they detected in Scripture.<sup>5</sup> However, it is another matter altogether, as Wright acknowledged, whether Calvin successfully rendered a coherent, unified body of teaching.<sup>6</sup> When assessing the various nineteenth- and twentieth-century approaches to this matter, three general classifications may be drawn.<sup>7</sup>

The first is the infamous “central-dogma” approach. For much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the most common approach to Calvin’s theology conjectured that his doctrine was organized around a single dogma. Thus, the essential task for commentators was to detect and extrapolate the central motif that supposedly governed his entire thought. In his analysis of Calvin scholarship from the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth, Wilhelm Niesel explained,

Calvin research suffers from the defect that the golden thread which runs through it has not yet been discovered. Certainly we are well informed about this or that individual feature of doctrine; but what is really in question when he writes his Institutes of the Christian Religion, what his governing intention is in constructing his theology, remains yet unknown to us. So long as we have not clearly grasped the kernel of the whole nor understood the essential inspiration, no attempt as an exposition of the whole can succeed.<sup>8</sup>

John Leith suggested that this interpretive approach stemmed from efforts to unite Lutheran and Reformed churches in Germany during the first half of the nineteenth

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<sup>3</sup> “To the Reader” in *Inst.* vol.1, p.4 (1539), *OS* 3:6. On Calvin’s intent to provide a comprehensive survey of Christian teaching, see T.H.L. Parker, “The Approach to Calvin,” *EQ* 16 (1944): 171; John H. Leith, “Calvin’s Theological Method and Ambiguity in His Theology,” *Reformation Studies: Essays in Honor of R.H. Bainton*, ed. F. Little (Richmond: John Knox, 1962), 106-114. Cf. Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 101-139.

<sup>4</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, who references Philip Melanchthon, *Loci communes theologici* (Wittenberg, 1521,1536,1543); Wolfgang Musculus, *Loci communes* (Basel: Iohannes Hervagius, 1560,1561,1573); Andreas Hyperius, *De theologo, seu de ratione studii theologici, libri IIII* (Basel, 1556,1559); and Peter Martyr Vermigli, *P.M. Vermiglii loci communes* (London, 1576; 2nd ed., 1583), which was published fourteen years after his death under the editorial work of Robert Massonius.

<sup>6</sup> Wright, preface to Garcia, *Life in Christ*, xv.

<sup>7</sup> I am indebted particularly to Venema, *Accepted and Renewed*, 14-21, who has wonderfully summarized the three general approaches to Calvin’s theology.

<sup>8</sup> Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 9.

century. In this search for unity, Leith remarks, scholars sought to understand not only Calvin's place in the history of Christian thought and his relation to Martin Luther in particular, but also the basic principle of Reformed theology.<sup>9</sup> Richard Muller, however, indicates that the central-dogma approach to Calvin research arose from an attempt to create a new system of Reformed theology, beginning "with the theological question of the use of the past as posed by followers of the Schleiermacherian and Hegelian attempts to place both theology and philosophy once again on a sound footing."<sup>10</sup> Whatever the initial impetus for this approach, it is now clear that many nineteenth- and twentieth-century commentators on Calvin analyzed his thought in light of their own understanding of theology, in terms of doctrinal centers or as a logical outworking of a series of principal motifs.<sup>11</sup>

Both Leith and Muller pinpoint the work of Alexander Schweizer as setting the stage for the type of Calvin research—and for scholarly investigation of Reformed theology more generally—that would dominate the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>12</sup> Schweizer, a student of Schleiermacher, focused on the "awareness [*Bewusstsein*] of absolute dependence" on God as the "Materialprincip" of Reformed theology.<sup>13</sup> Schweizer also stated that the *Bewusstsein* of absolute dependence upon God expresses itself particularly in the doctrine of predestination.<sup>14</sup> Scholars soon began to argue that God's sovereignty and divine election were the central themes not just of Reformed theology, but also of Calvin's. In his 1869 Calvin biography, for example, Franz Wilhelm Kampschulte argued that predestination was the dominating feature of Calvinism and the basis for every part of Calvin's teaching.<sup>15</sup> For the next half-century, this became almost the consensus among those utilizing the central-dogma approach.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Leith, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 28.

<sup>10</sup> Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> On Schweizer's theology, see Brian A. Gerrish, *Tradition and the Modern World: Reformed Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1978), 119-136.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Schweizer, *Die Glaubenslehre der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche dargestellt und aus den Quellen belegt*, 2 vols. (Zurich: Orell, Fussli & Co., 1844), 1:45; Leith, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 28; Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Schweizer, *Glaubenslehre*, 2:189; Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Franz Wilhelm Kampschulte, *Johann Calvin: seine kirche und sein staat in Genf* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1869), 263.

<sup>16</sup> Venema, *Accepted and Renewed*, 15. On the development in scholarly approaches to Calvin and Calvinism, see Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 1-13. As both Muller and Venema demonstrate, not all Calvin scholars during this era designated divine sovereignty and predestination as central to Calvin's theology, or worked within the central-dogma paradigm.

Several publications during the early twentieth century argued for a different approach to Calvin's theology: the form-method approach, our second general approach. In 1921, Émile Doumergue acknowledged the significance of God's sovereignty for Calvin, yet opposed the idea that his theology was governed by a single motif. Calvin employed a *méthode des contrariétés*, he argued.<sup>17</sup> Pointing to the opening of the *Institutio*, which states that all our knowledge pertains to God and ourselves, Doumergue claimed that Calvin's theology employs two methods simultaneously and establishes "apparent contradictions."<sup>18</sup> In 1922, Hermann Bauke postulated that a key reason for conflicting interpretations of Calvin is that scholars had been focusing on the *content* of Calvin's theology to the neglect of its *formation* or *styling* (*Formgestaltung*).<sup>19</sup> Calvin's theology, Bauke argued, is not arranged around any "Zentrallehre" or "Stammlehre"<sup>20</sup> because, unlike Schleiermacher's, it contains no "Materialprinzip" whatsoever.<sup>21</sup> Calvin's theology, therefore, can be properly understood only by assessing its form: "Die Form natürlich nicht nur in dem Sinne der äusseren Gewandung, des Stiles, der Anordnung, Einteilung usw., sondern in dem umfassenderen und tieferen Sinne der Verarbeitung sowohl wie der Gestaltung und inneren Formgebung des gesamten theologischen Inhaltes."<sup>22</sup>

Bauke detected three distinct characteristics of Calvin's *Formgestaltung*. The first is a formal-dialectical rationalism, whereby Calvin relates and systematizes theological themes in antithetical fashion.<sup>23</sup> The second is *complexio oppositorum*. Involving dialectical rationalism, this enables Calvin to juxtapose opposing theological ideas without relating them coherently.<sup>24</sup> Calvin's theology, therefore, is not a unified system organized around a single doctrine but an attempt to synthesize dogmatic themes that are logically incompatible.<sup>25</sup> The third characteristic of Calvin's form is biblicism,

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<sup>17</sup> Émile Doumergue, *Le Caractère de Calvin. L'Homme. Le Système. L'Église. L'État* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), 76-82.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

<sup>19</sup> Hermann Bauke, *Die Probleme der Theologie Calvins* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1922), 11-20.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 12: "The form, of course, not only in the sense of external garb, style, arrangement, classification, etc., but in the broader and deeper sense of the processing, both as the organization and interior shaping of the entire theological content."

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 13-16; Venema, *Accepted and Renewed*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Bauke, *Die Probleme*, 16-19; Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 13; Venema, *Accepted and Renewed*, 16-17.

meaning that Calvin attempted to not only derive his theology from Scripture, but also provide a synthetic account of all the teachings of Scripture, even if they have no inherent potential to be synthesized.<sup>26</sup>

While some commentators continued to work from the central-dogma approach, Bauke's study pushed Calvin scholarship in a different direction. It not only emphasized the need to consider the form *and* content of Calvin's theology, but also, as Leith observed, "dealt a devastating blow to the notion that Calvin was a speculative systemitizier who deduced a system of theology from one or two principles."<sup>27</sup> By focusing on the form of Calvin's theology, with the aim of discovering his intended method, later scholars demonstrated that while certain motifs play a significant role in Calvin's thought, multiple doctrines and themes work together and are integral to Calvin's larger theological complex.<sup>28</sup> Yet not all scholars believed the form-method approach could resolve the perceived problems in Calvin's theology, particularly his *Institutio*, and conflicting proposals and interpretations continued to abound. Thus, the rise of our third key approach: the so-called "neo-orthodox" or christocentric-revelation approach.

One example of this approach is found in the work of Niesel: "The problems of [Calvin's] theology does not arise from questions of structure or from those of content, but from the fact that it makes a serious attempt to be theology. This means: in Calvin's doctrine it is a question of the content of all contents—the living God."<sup>29</sup> One on level, Niesel distanced himself from the central-dogma school; he did not see Calvin's theology as a system regulated by a single doctrine. Yet his conclusions reflect that he shared their general instinct: Calvin's theology could be truly grasped only in light of "the kernel of the whole" or its "essential inspiration."<sup>30</sup> For Niesel, the essential inspiration of Calvin's theology was not some static, impersonal doctrine but the personal "God revealed in flesh."<sup>31</sup> Therefore, "the form of Calvin's theology was

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<sup>26</sup> Bauke, *Die Probleme*, 19-20; Venema, *Accepted and Renewed*, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Leith, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Dowey, *Knowledge of God*, and T.H.L Parker, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Study in the Theology of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1969), argued for the significance of the knowledge of God in Calvin's *Institutio*. Cf. Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 18-21. For a list of scholars who argued that the twofold knowledge of God and man is *a* or *the* controlling structure of Calvin's theology, see Gamble, "Calvin as Theologian and Exegete," 180.

<sup>29</sup> Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 19.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

shaped by the axis on which it revolves. Jesus Christ controls not only the content but also the form of Calvinistic thought.”<sup>32</sup>

The neo-orthodox approach, as Venema notes, shaped the course of Calvin studies until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>33</sup> However, historical-theological studies in recent decades have identified the need to study Calvin’s work in historical context without reading it through contemporary categories and assumptions.<sup>34</sup> Such investigation includes analyzing both the continuities and discontinuities of Calvin’s work in relation to the medieval tradition, his contemporaries, and his theological successors. This methodological shift has proved fruitful for Calvin research, yet some assumptions of the older paradigms still linger in recent studies.

## **1.2. Approaches to Specific Themes in Calvin’s Theology**

Now we turn to more specific paradigms and proposals, focusing on themes integral to Calvin’s soteriology and understanding of the Christian life. Analyses of these discussions will not only demonstrate how some assumptions from older approaches to Calvin’s theology in general manifest themselves in approaches to specific themes in his teaching, but more importantly raise issues that will provide opportunities to reconsider Calvin’s understanding of works-righteousness in relation to faith-righteousness.

### **1.2.1. The *Duplex Gratia* and *Unio cum Christo***

Prior to *Institutio* book 3, Calvin explains not just what Christ has accomplished, but also what humanity’s condition is. To understand the former, readers must understand the latter. The fall brought upon rebellious, sinful humanity a double plight: guilt and corruption.<sup>35</sup> Yet in Christ, God has provided a remedy for our guilt and corruption, for unrighteous human beings to be restored to righteousness—both situationally *coram Deo* and experientially. God declares believers innocent (reckons righteous) on account of Christ’s righteousness; and instead of leaving them in their corruption, he gradually

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>33</sup> Venema, *Accepted and Renewed*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> While many studies could be mentioned, I point to Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, and David Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (Oxford: OUP, 1995).

<sup>35</sup> See *Inst.* 2.1.5-11, especially 2.1.8. I am indebted to Jonathan Rainbow, “Double Grace: John Calvin’s View of the Relationship of Justification and Sanctification,” *ExAud* 5 (1989): 100-102, for highlighting this double plight and providing the terminology.

makes believers righteous by his Spirit.<sup>36</sup> God resolves our “double plight with a double grace”<sup>37</sup>: “that being reconciled to God through Christ’s blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ’s spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.”<sup>38</sup>

That justification and sanctification are integral to Calvin’s applied soteriology has not been lost on interpreters. Yet, as Venema notes, “The general approach that interpreters have taken to Calvin’s theology has often had important implications for the interpretation of the ‘twofold grace of God.’”<sup>39</sup> It is not surprising, then, that some who worked within the central-dogma paradigm, such as Ritschl and Weber, saw justification as subservient to predestination.<sup>40</sup> While the question regarding the significance of the *duplex gratia* in Calvin’s theology is indeed important, the question concerning the relation between justification and sanctification has produced considerable disagreement.

Erwin Mülhaupt believed the juxtaposition of justification and moral renewal established a problem in Calvin’s theology,<sup>41</sup> and various scholars during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries argued that Calvin does not coherently relate the two.<sup>42</sup> Willy Lüttge also perceived tension in Calvin’s soteriology, focusing on justification and its relation to union with Christ.<sup>43</sup> Lüttge rightly recognizes that Calvin uses *imputation* in two distinct ways: negatively, in reference to the non-imputation of sin, and positively,

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<sup>36</sup> See George Hunsinger, “A Tale of Two Simultaneities,” in *Calvin, Beza and Later Calvinism: Papers Presented at the 15th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society, April 7-9, 2006*, ed. David Foxgrover and Charles Edward Raynal (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2006), 225.

<sup>37</sup> Rainbow, “Double Grace,” 102.

<sup>38</sup> *Inst.* 3.11.1 (1539), *OS* 4:182.

<sup>39</sup> Venema, *Accepted and Renewed*, 22,

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. Otto Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1926), 186, who argued that justification, for Calvin, simply effects God’s elective decree. Similarly, Hans Emil Weber, *Reformation, Orthodoxie und Rationalismus* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1937), 239, argued that justification merely manifests God’s decretive will.

<sup>41</sup> Erwin Mülhaupt, *Die Predigt Calvins, ihre Geschichte, ihre Form und ihre religiösen Grundgedanken* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1931), 152.

<sup>42</sup> See Venema, *Accepted and Renewed*, 23, who points to Mülhaupt, *Die Predigt Calvins*, 152; Weber, *Reformation, Orthodoxie und Rationalismus*, 239; Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, 199-200; Alexandre Ganoczy, *Calvin, théologien de l’Église et du ministère* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1964), 95-110; and Paul Wernle, *Der Evngelische Glaube, Nach den Haupschriften der Reformation*, vol. 3, *Calvin* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1919), 254.

<sup>43</sup> Willy Lüttge, *Die Rechtfertigungslehre Calvins und ihre Bedeutung für seine Frömmigkeit* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1909), 41-51. This discussion of Lüttge is in part dependent upon Venema, *Accepted and Renewed*, 150-152; and Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 10.

in reference to the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Lüttge argues that Calvin fails to relate the two to each another and the second, *forensische* to his concept of union.<sup>44</sup> Lüttge sees in Calvin both justification as imputation and justification through union, which he believes are conceptually incompatible.<sup>45</sup> Yet he does not suggest that Calvin simply juxtaposes two incompatible concepts dialectically. Rather, he argues that Calvin subordinates his forensic notion of justification to union, concluding that forgiveness is not only connected to but also stems from moral renewal through union with Christ.<sup>46</sup> Further, neither justification as imputation and justification through union, nor justification and sanctification share equal importance because Calvin relates the two by means of subordination.

Leith detected tension in Calvin's understanding of sanctification. The reason for Calvin's inconsistencies, Leith argued, is due to not only his frequent use of paradox, but also inconsistencies in his theological methodology. Calvin intended to comment on Scripture and creed, not to systematize, but unintentionally did both, Leith argued—and for two reasons. First, Calvin's methodology included a formal biblicism, by which Leith meant that Calvin aimed to consistently and completely represent the teachings of Scripture. Second, Calvin displays an implicit confidence in human reason, despite his continual rejection of reason as a source for formulating theology. These two factors, which Leith saw as contradictory, entered into Calvin's methodology and “continually threatened his theological intentions.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, Calvin is inconsistent in the way he expounds several features of the Christian life: the glory of God, the nature of the law, the nature of Scripture, the meaning of predestination, and the nature of the church. “These contradictions,” Leith argued, “reveal the conflict between Calvin the exegete of scripture and Calvin the systemizer of scripture, giving the data of scripture an ordered, coherent form.”<sup>48</sup> Moreover, “His theology is not as fully integrated as the outward appearance of coherence and consistency had led many to believe.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Lüttge, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 43.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 43-44; William Wright, *Calvin's Salvation in Writing: A Confessional Academic Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 78.

<sup>46</sup> Lüttge, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 48.

<sup>47</sup> Leith, “Calvin's Theological Method,” 113.

<sup>48</sup> Leith, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 218.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 223. Leith argued further that scholarly attempts to harmonize Calvin's theology, as if it were consistent in both pattern and content, lead to serious difficulties. Consequently, Calvin's tendencies in theological methodology have been exalted both “into a rigid dogma by the fundamentalists” and by those that emphasize “the intensely personal and deeply mutual relationship of the Christian to God” (224). Therefore, the reason for divergent

Expressing appreciation for Ganoczy and reflecting an approach somewhat similar to Leith's, Brian Armstrong argued that Calvin's theology should be analyzed in light of the differences between the Renaissance and the Reformation. Armstrong suggested that Calvin lived in the tension of these movements, which Armstrong claims are fundamentally at odds, and was unable to resolve the diverging ideologies represented by the movements. Consequently, Calvin's theology "was accommodated to conflicting ideologies in such a way that there will always be two poles, two aspects, two dialectical and conflicting elements in each theological topic which he addresses."<sup>50</sup>

According to Armstrong, the dialectical structure of the *Institutio*, and therefore of each *locus* discussed therein, is not only a response to the tension between Renaissance and Reformation programs, but also "fundamentally based in a broad, general philosophical dialectic between the ideal and the real," and serves as the basis for the division of the *Institutio* into four books.<sup>51</sup> Yet Armstrong recognized the spiritual nature of Calvin's theology, which has worship as its ultimate goal. Armstrong thus argued that one must avoid trying to understand Calvin's theology in terms of *loci* and instead understand it in light of such pervasive themes as relationship and communion with God. However, the "ideal" original condition of humanity, which enjoyed uninterrupted communion with God, has been disrupted by the "real" world, which is dominated by sin. Armstrong pinpoints this reality as providing "a natural transition from the nature of Calvin's theology to the structure which provides its setting." Thus, "It is this constant tension, interplay, and interrelationship between the ideal world of God's goodness and the 'real' world where evil triumphs over good which provides an important key to understanding the structure of Calvin's thought."<sup>52</sup>

Armstrong argued that the ideal/real structure of Calvin's thought is seen most clearly in the relation between justification and sanctification:

The position [Calvin] sets forth here is a fundamental distinction made by the Protestant Reformers; namely, that viewed from the perspective of justification (i.e., viewed in Christ) the individual is pure and holy, accepted and forgiven. On the other hand, viewed from the perspective of sanctification (i.e., viewed in themselves and from the perspective of their actual condition and performance),

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interpretations of Calvin is that he himself is inconsistent in his own theological methodology and elaborations, Leith argued.

<sup>50</sup> Armstrong, "*Duplex cognitio*," 137.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 142.



all believers are still enmeshed in sin, impure, and in need of constant forgiveness.<sup>53</sup>

Armstrong's assessment is problematic for several reasons. First, it potentially conflates the Reformers' respective understandings of justification and sanctification, as if they fully agreed on the nature of both and their precise relationship. Second, it suggests that justification is accomplished in Christ while sanctification is accomplished predominantly by human effort.<sup>54</sup> Armstrong's study is not without merit, however. He insightfully argues that the ideal/real gap in Calvin's soteriology is bridged by the "hypothetical motif" of union with Christ: "The entire discussion of soteriology is a working out of the mystical union principle. In Christ we have restored to us the spiritual life which was lost in Adam. When it comes to our restoration to righteousness, 'we possess it only because we are partakers in Christ: indeed with him we possess all its riches' (3.11.23)."<sup>55</sup> Thus, elements of both the form-method and chirstocentric approaches can be detected in Armstrong's study: he argues not only that Calvin's theology is structured dialectically, but also that union with Christ is "central and crucial to the fabric of the hypothetical structure of his thought."<sup>56</sup>

In the decades following Armstrong's study, many interpreters have maintained that Calvin successfully relates justification and sanctification by linking them to *unio cum Christo*. Moreover, the centrality of *unio* in Calvin's applied soteriology has been substantiated by an increasing number of scholars.<sup>57</sup> This does not mean that the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>54</sup> Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 23-24, perceives similar problems and rightly argues that Armstrong's positioning of a fundamental tension between Renaissance and Reformation is unnecessary and fails to recognize continuity between the two movements. On Calvin's relationship to medieval scholasticism, see Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 39-61.

<sup>55</sup> Armstrong, "Duplex cognitio," 148.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> E.g., Craig B. Carpenter, "A Question of Union with Christ? Calvin and Trent on Justification," *WTJ* 64.2 (2002): 363-86; Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards," *WTJ* 65 (2003): 165-79; idem., "Justification and Union with Christ: *Institutes* 3.11-18," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, eds. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback, (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008), 248-69; Garcia, *Life in Christ*; Marcus Johnson, "New or Nuanced Perspective on Calvin? A Reply to Thomas Wenger," *JETS* 51.3 (2008): 543-58; Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 125; Charles Partee, "Calvin's Central Dogma Again," *SCJ* 18.2 (Summer 1987): 191-199; idem., *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville: WJKP, 2008), 27; Stephen Strehle, *The Catholic Roots of the Protestant Gospel: Encounter Between the Middle Ages and the Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 66-67; Lane G. Tipton, "Union with Christ and Justification," in *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Ross-Shire: Christian Focus, 2007), 39.

importance of *unio* was lost on interpreters prior to Armstrong's 1989 study.<sup>58</sup> Nor does it mean that the centrality-of-union approach has gone unscrutinized.<sup>59</sup> Critics fear this interpretive paradigm runs the risk of perpetuating the problems inherent in the central-dogma approach.<sup>60</sup> Yet as Marcus Johnson explains, "There is a significant difference between the claim that union with Christ is the central dogma of Calvin's thought, and the claim that union with Christ is the 'controlling principle of the Reformer's doctrine of applied soteriology.'"<sup>61</sup>

Particular interlocutors have identified *unio* as the central feature of Calvin's soteriology by observing the *ordo docendi* in his *Institutio*. It is often acknowledged that Calvin discusses salvation *accomplished* in book 2 and salvation *applied* in book 3. Or as Tjarko Stadtland remarked, book 2 presents the objective aspects of salvation, while book 3 presents the subjective.<sup>62</sup> Johnson observes that though Calvin speaks of justification and sanctification in connection with Christ's death and resurrection in book 2, he says little on how these benefits come to believers; thus, the title "How We Receive the Grace of Christ" at the beginning of book 3 marks Calvin's explicit transition to applied soteriology, Johnson argues.<sup>63</sup> According to Johnson, book 3 shows that we receive Christ's benefits by being personally united to the Savior.<sup>64</sup>

William Evans focuses primarily on the *ordo docendi* of book 3, explaining that Calvin "calls attention to the believer's union with Christ prior to any discussion of the benefits which Christ brings to those united with him." This priority, Evans argues,

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<sup>58</sup> E.g., Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, 4:275; Leith, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 98-103; Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 120-139; Partee, "Calvin's Central Dogma Again," 191-199; Tjarko Stadtland, *Rechtfertigung und Heiligung bei Calvin* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972), 118-124; François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 234-242.

<sup>59</sup> For accounts opposed to identifying union with Christ as the central theme of Calvin's soteriology, see: J.V. Fesko, *Beyond Calvin: Union with Christ and Justification in Early Modern Reformed Theology (1517-1700)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012); idem., "Calvin on Justification and Recent Misinterpretations of His View," *MAJT* 16 (2005): 83-114; Thomas L. Wenger, "The New Perspective on Calvin: Responding to Recent Calvin Interpretations," *JETS* 50.2 (2007): 311-28; idem., "Theological Spectacles and a Paradigm of Centrality: a Reply to Marcus Johnson," *JETS* 51.3 (2008): 559-572; Wright, *Calvin's Salvation in Writing*.

<sup>60</sup> E.g., Wenger, "The New Perspective on Calvin," 314.

<sup>61</sup> Johnson, "New Or Nuanced Perspective," 545.

<sup>62</sup> Stadtland, *Rechtfertigung*, 112.

<sup>63</sup> Johnson, "New Or Nuanced Perspective," 549. Cf. Lane, "The Role of Scripture," 370; Wendel, *Calvin*, 234-242.

<sup>64</sup> Johnson, "New Or Nuanced Perspective," 549. Cf. Wendel, *Calvin*, 234.

“points to the importance and necessity of union.”<sup>65</sup> This does not mean that Calvin’s *ordo salutis* correlates one-to-one with his *ordo docendi* in book 3. To suggest such would erroneously imply that justification is based upon sanctification—a notion that Calvin vehemently rejects—since he discusses sanctification before justification. Still, if Calvin prioritizes *unio* in his *ordo docendi*, does he prioritize it in his *ordo salutis*? If so, does he ascribe a causal relationship between *unio* and the *duplex gratia*?

Doumergue argued that Christ’s death is the *cause* of justification and that mystical union is the *means* by which we receive it.<sup>66</sup> While Doumergue rightly stressed the vitality of union in receiving justification, he problematically stated, “dans la justification par la foi, Calvin comprend non pas *un* élément, mais *deux*; . . . a l’*attribution*, vient se joindre l’élément moral, la *régénération* ou la *sanctification*.”<sup>67</sup> In attempting to resolve the perceived tension between justification and sanctification, as Walter Stuermann rightly observed, “Doumergue commits here and elsewhere the error which Calvin was so anxious to avoid, namely, that of confusing (formally) justification and regeneration.”<sup>68</sup>

While Doumergue correctly highlights *unio* as the means whereby believers receive justification, later scholars recognized that *unio* functions as the means whereby believers receive both justification *and* sanctification. Further, interpreters have argued that Calvin successfully relates both without confusing them. Mark Garcia has argued that “the rationale for both justification and sanctification is to be identified exclusively with the (spiritual, not essential or ontological) union believers have with Christ.”<sup>69</sup> Venema agrees that the *duplex gratia* comes to believers by way of *unio*, yet further recognizes that Calvin’s discussion of *unio* in the beginning of book 3 serves as a prologue to the remainder of the *Institutio*: “it is by virtue of the Spirit’s work within us, making us partakers of Christ through faith, that we are justified, sanctified, set at liberty, invited into the fellowship of the church, and enabled to participate in its sacraments. Through the Spirit’s work ‘in us’ (in nobis), we are able to participate in and enjoy the benefits of Christ’s works ‘for us’ (pro nobis).”<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 7.

<sup>66</sup> Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, 4:275.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 4:270-271: “in justification by faith, Calvin includes not *one* element, but *two*; . . . attribution comes to join the moral element, *regeneration* or *sanctification*.”

<sup>68</sup> Walter E. Stuermann, *A Critical Study of Calvin’s Concept of Faith*, PhD diss. (Tulsa: University of Tulsa, 1952), 182. Cf. Venema, *Accepted and Renewed*, 152-153n.8.

<sup>69</sup> Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 248.

<sup>70</sup> Venema, *Accepted and Renewed*, 84.

While many interpreters agree that Calvin coherently relates justification and sanctification by grounding them in *unio*, debate has ensued over whether justification and sanctification share equal theological importance. Richard Gaffin stated, “The relative ‘ordo’ or priority of justification and sanctification is indifferent theologically.”<sup>71</sup> Gaffin means not that the two benefits are conceptually identical, nor that Calvin minimizes justification *sola fide*, but that each benefit is equally important for salvation. Over time, however, Gaffin has nuanced his claim by explaining that justification is logically prior to sanctification, because the believer’s good works are fruits and signs of having been justified. Still, “This is not the same thing as saying, what Calvin does not say, that justification is the source of sanctification or that justification causes sanctification. That source, that cause is Christ by his Spirit.”<sup>72</sup>

Commentators such as Venema, John Fesko, J. Todd Billings, and Thomas Wenger—all of whom recognize the importance of *unio* for Calvin—are critical of this specific interpretation.<sup>73</sup> While Venema acknowledges that believers are “simultaneously justified and sanctified” when “united to Christ by the office of the Holy Spirit,”<sup>74</sup> he believes Calvin ascribes “theological subsequence of sanctification in relation to justification.”<sup>75</sup> Fesko argues that to remove the priority of justification is both theologically and historically problematic, accusing the “Gaffin-school on Calvin and union” of unnecessarily pitting Calvin against Lutherans, as if Calvin held a

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<sup>71</sup> Gaffin, “Biblical Theology,” 177.

<sup>72</sup> Gaffin, “Justification and Union,” 256 (emphasis original). Cf. Fesko, *Beyond Calvin*, 19, who highlights this development in Gaffin’s understanding. For interpretations similar to Gaffin’s, see Carpenter, “A Question of Union With Christ?” 381-385; Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 260; Lane, “The Role of Scripture,” 371.

<sup>73</sup> These scholars are not the only ones to advocate that Calvin attributed logical or even theological priority to justification, seeing it as the source or basis of sanctification. Cf. Jean Boisset, “Justification et Sanctification chez Calvin,” in *Calvinus Theologus: die Referate de Congrès Européen de Recherches Calviniennes ... vom 16. bis 19. September 1974 in Amsterdam*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976), 131, who also claims that justification “precedes” sanctification; Leith, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 97, who states that justification is the “foundation” or “basis” for sanctification; Barbara Pitkin, “Faith and Justification,” in *Calvin Handbook*, 298, who argues that while both benefits are given simultaneously, “justification has a certain logical and theological priority.” Cf. David W. Hall, “Explicit and implicit appendixes to Calvin’s view of justification by faith,” *Since We Are Justified by Faith: Justification in the Theologies of the Protestant Reformation*, ed. Michael Parsons (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2010):105.

<sup>74</sup> Venema, *Accepted and Renewed*, 269.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 136n.9. Venema is directly criticizing Carpenter and Garcia. Cf. Paul Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 405-406.

conceptually different understanding of justification.<sup>76</sup> Billings and Wenger believe such an interpretation also establishes unwarranted discontinuity between Calvin and later Calvinists.<sup>77</sup>

William Wright argues that justification and sanctification are not equally significant for Calvin.<sup>78</sup> Wright also claims that Calvin is inconsistent in his writings, observing that Calvin sometimes describes justification as an end in itself while at other times describes sanctification as the goal of justification.<sup>79</sup> He also states that Calvin tends to “align justification or faith with Christ and the Father” yet sanctification “with the Spirit,” or to assign justification more to Christ’s priesthood yet sanctification to Christ’s kingship.<sup>80</sup> Wright additionally notes that Calvin uses various metaphors—primarily forensic and organic ones—when describing *unio*.<sup>81</sup> Such conflicting statements, Wright argues, “do not cohere in an immediately obvious way.”<sup>82</sup> As Wright remarks, some interpreters, especially those working with the *unio* approach, “show a charitable both/and interpretation of the conflicts, according to which they rest content that Calvin’s account of salvation contains elements that are distinct and cannot be reduced to each other.”<sup>83</sup> Yet for Wright, most both/and attempts are unsatisfactory. Further, the recent emphasis on *unio* in relating justification and sanctification insufficiently accounts for the tension between “forensic justification” and “union with Christ,” each of which he sees as “a complete and consistent account of salvation” in

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<sup>76</sup> Fesko, “Calvin on Justification,” 96-104. Anticipating and rebutting criticisms such as these, Garcia and Johnson point to the work of Lutheran scholar Timothy Wengert and claim that while Calvin was appreciative of Melanchthon’s methodology and doctrine, he did not obsequiously follow either. See Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 259; Johnson, “New Or Nuanced Perspective,” 548; Timothy Wengert, “We Will Feast Together in Heaven Forever: The Epistolary Friendship of John Calvin and Philip Melanchthon,” in *Melanchthon in Europe: His Work and Influence Beyond Wittenberg*, ed. Karin Maag (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 19-44. Johnson also points to Zachman, *Calvin as Teacher, Pastor, and Theologian*, 53n.102, who shows that despite Calvin’s approval of the Augsburg Confession, Calvin tried to prevent it from entering France after Melanchthon’s death.

<sup>77</sup> J. Todd Billings, “John Calvin’s Soteriology: On the Multifaceted ‘Sum’ of the Gospel,” *IJST* 11.4 (October, 2009), 445-446; Wenger, “New Perspective on Calvin,” 314-321.

<sup>78</sup> Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 85,230.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 75,86.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64. Regarding Christ’s priesthood-kingship in relation to justification and sanctification respectively, Wright points to Stadtland, *Rechtfertigung*, 140-143, and Werner Krusche, *Die Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), 277.

<sup>81</sup> Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 74-75.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

Calvin's thought.<sup>84</sup> Wright seeks to find coherence in Calvin's theology by considering Hegel on dialectic and Derrida on difference.<sup>85</sup> And inspired by Lüttge, he seeks to highlight such tension by acknowledging it to its fullest and argues that neither forensic justification nor union can be favored over the other. Only by holding both together dialectically, Wright argues, can one make sense of "the irreducible diversity of things Calvin says about justification, sanctification, and their relationship."<sup>86</sup>

What is important to understand about the insistence on the theological "indifference" between justification and sanctification, as Gaffin put it, is that it aims to safeguard Calvin's own assertion that the two are distinct yet inseparable.<sup>87</sup> To suggest that justification is the cause of sanctification, some interpreters perceive, could imply that believers can be justified without being sanctified, which contradicts Calvin's teaching.<sup>88</sup> Thus, Johnson, Garcia, and others wish to underscore Calvin's teaching that *renovatio* is essential to the Christian life, that those justified will necessarily be sanctified.<sup>89</sup>

In addition to highlighting the means whereby Christ's benefits come to believers and the inextricable link between justification and sanctification, the larger discussion regarding the function of *unio* in Calvin's thought has demonstrated the necessity of good works. Although believers are not justified *by* works, Calvin teaches, they are not justified *without* works.<sup>90</sup> Thus, if sanctification is necessary for salvation, what precise role do works play in believers' lives?

On this point, Garcia's study is particularly stimulating. Garcia questions, "How can a definitive pardon, freely bestowed on the basis of a righteousness imputed from outside us (*extra nos*), be tied meaningfully to the divine promise and demand of a holy

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 81

<sup>85</sup> While Wright's study is insightful and creative, his method of employing later philosophical figures is problematic. Granted, Wright admits that he is "not attempting a strictly or even primarily historical investigation of Calvin's coherence" (44). Such methodology raises the question as to what extent the concepts and categories of later figures elucidate Calvin's thought. At minimum, Wright runs the risk of anachronism. His research is nevertheless insightful and will be occasionally helpful for this present study.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>87</sup> See Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 33; *Inst.* 3.16.1 (mainly 1539), *OS* 4:249; 3.11.6 (1559), *OS* 4:187.

<sup>88</sup> See *Inst.* 3.16.1 (mainly 1539), *OS* 4:249.

<sup>89</sup> Those who insist on a non-ordering of justification and sanctification, however, are *not* unique in emphasizing Calvin's teaching that moral renewal is integral to salvation. E.g., Venema, *Accepted and Renewed*, 269.

<sup>90</sup> See *Inst.* 3.16.1 (1539), *OS* 4:249. Cf. Lane, "The Role of Scripture," 372-373; Fesko, "Calvin on Justification," 93.

life, understood as something very much within us (*in nobis*)”<sup>91</sup> The answer is *unio*, Garcia argues. In three case studies, Garcia explores how *unio* functioned in Calvin’s theology and concludes that Calvin’s understanding of the relation between justification and sanctification allows him to occupy theological terrain “equidistant” between Rome and Luther.<sup>92</sup>

In his first case study, Garcia analyzes Calvin’s Romans commentary and identifies what he calls Calvin’s “replication principle.” According to Garcia, Calvin taught that Paul’s *ordo salutis* reflects the experience believers have in Christ by the Spirit. Accordingly, the doctrine of *unio* links Romans 5 and 6, and therefore justification and sanctification; and because the faithful are united to Christ, the Spirit replicates Christ’s death and resurrection in their lives through the *duplex gratia*. Thus, the salvation won for us by Christ is not simply justification, but justification and sanctification. Yet for Calvin, Christ’s death and resurrection do not correspond to only the two parts of salvation. Garcia remarks, “In a potentially confusing way, Calvin thus argues that the death and resurrection of Christ requires a particular understanding of both the *duplex gratia* and the *duplex regeneratio* [mortification and vivification]. In the former, emphasis falls on the inseparability of justification and the sanctification in Christ. In the latter, emphasis falls on the inseparability of death to sin and newness of life in Christ.” Moreover, Garcia finds in Calvin’s comments on Romans 8 the “crucial strands that bring into view the larger fabric of his replication model.”<sup>93</sup> Calvin teaches that the Christ pattern in Romans 8 is the pattern or sequence of salvation. Not only that, Romans 8 holds theological and hermeneutical priority for Calvin: “Calvin read the conditional passages of Romans, in which eternal life is promised as a reward for good works [Rom. 2:13], through the Pauline *ordo salutis* he found summarized in Rom. 8:28-30.”<sup>94</sup> Thus, the eternal life promised to law-keepers is received only by those who experience the pattern of Christ’s own experience—a transition from humiliation to exaltation, suffering to glory. The Spirit’s work of replication, therefore, is a “*sine qua non* of salvation.”<sup>95</sup> Yet it is not only suffering/humiliation that is a necessary though non-meritorious prerequisite of salvation; so is obedience: “Good works belong to the established *ordo* of salvation as the *via* through which, according to the divine

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<sup>91</sup> Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 2.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

administration, those united to Christ ultimately receive their inheritance.”<sup>96</sup> Further, “Calvin is thus rather comfortable ascribing soteriological causation to good works, but once again, this language can only be appreciated within the context established by replication. Specifically, Calvin regards what comes prior in God’s appointed *ordo* as ‘causing’ what follows, thus making it possible to insist that Christian obedience, as it comes before the reception of the inheritance of eternal life, yields this reward.”<sup>97</sup> Thus, in claiming that the ideas of “*sequence*, *order*, and *pattern* are of the highest importance to Calvin in his handling of conditional language,”<sup>98</sup> Garcia argues that Calvin’s replication principle demonstrates the necessity of good works for (eschatological) salvation while safeguarding them from what the Reformer considered the monstrous notion of merit.<sup>99</sup>

Garcia further explains that Calvin’s replication principle depends on his pneumatic Christology, claiming that the “interdependence of christological and pneumatological themes within Calvin’s wider soteriological construct is thus of the highest importance.”<sup>100</sup> Garcia demonstrates this meticulously in his second and third case studies, by exploring Calvin’s Eucharistic theology, especially his rejection of the Lutheran *manducatio impiorum*—the idea that even the faithless partake of Christ in the Supper because he is bodily present in the elements—and his heated critique of Osiander. It is in these case studies that Garcia advocates most forcefully for Calvin’s divergence from Lutheran theology.<sup>101</sup> In his concluding remarks, Garcia claims that the cumulative effect of his case studies demonstrates that Calvin and Lutherans cannot be distinguished exclusively by their understandings of predestination and the Lord’s Supper. Albeit, Garcia acknowledges that “Calvin’s understanding of ‘justification’ is

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 145. Garcia frequently qualifies that while Calvin ascribes soteriological value to believers’ works, Calvin sees works as a secondary rather than primary cause. Garcia indicates that readers must understand Calvin’s metaphysic in order to understand his reading of the conditional language of Scripture. Calvin’s metaphysic will be highlighted particularly in chapters 3-4, and the soteriological value of works will be discussed in chapter 4.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Steven J. Chester, “Faith Working through Love (Galatians 5:6): The Role of Human Deeds in Salvation in Luther and Calvin’s Exegesis,” in *Doing Theology for the Church: Essays in Honor of Klyne Snodgrass*, eds. Rebekah A. Eklund and John E. Phelan Jr. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 49, who states that, for Calvin, good works are “a condition of” and “essential to salvation.”

<sup>100</sup> Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 256.

<sup>101</sup> However, Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 259, especially n.10, argues that while Calvin criticizes his Lutheran opponents on the issue of the Lord’s Supper and Osiander over the issue of justification, he never criticizes Melancthon for his understanding of good works.



basically synonymous with the brief definitions found in the classic Lutheran confessions.” However, he claims that Calvin differs from Lutherans in his understanding of “the *relationship* justification bears to other aspects of God’s saving work and the *context* in which justification is to be understood.” The reason for the their basic differences exists in their respective conceptions of justifying faith: “at the heart of the inseparability in Calvin’s *unio Christi–duplex gratia* formulation is a justifying faith that is defined not only passively, as a resting on Christ alone, but actively, as an obedient faith that, resting on Christ alone, perseveres in the pursuit of holiness.”<sup>102</sup> While Garcia’s thesis has received pointed criticism,<sup>103</sup> it raises important questions regarding the nature of justifying faith and the role of good works in believers’ lives. More specifically, it raises the question of how Calvin’s conceptual framework and theological methodology enabled him to ascribe soteriological value to good works, if he indeed did so. Finally, if justifying faith is both passive and active, is justification analytic in some sense?

### 1.2.2. The *Duplex Gratia* and Covenantal Obedience

Billings, mentioned earlier, also underscores the significance of *unio* for Calvin. Although Billings does not state *unio* has controlling significance for Calvin, he claims that it “has undeniable importance for an examination of his theology of participation in Christ.”<sup>104</sup> He also asserts that Calvin prioritizes justification as the “first grace,” which “provides the context for the second [sanctification].” While Billings differs from Garcia and others in this regard, he affirms with them that justification and sanctification are “distinct, yet inseparable,” with “no temporal gap” between the two, and that it is “impossible to receive one without the other.”<sup>105</sup> And like Garcia, he explores whether Calvin renders believers as merely passive agents in salvation.

Contra portraits that Calvin’s theology reduces salvation to a unilateral gift, Billings argues that Calvin developed a robust theology of participation. And Calvin

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>103</sup> Critics take issue with Garcia’s study on both historiographical and theological levels, claiming that he unnecessarily positions Calvin against Luther(ans) and later Calvinists by stating that justification is not the source of sanctification. See Billings, “John Calvin’s Soteriology,” 444-447; Fesko, *Beyond Calvin*, 21-22; idem., “Metaphysics and Justification: Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Reformed Theology,” *CTJ* 46 (2011): 29-47.

<sup>104</sup> Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 19.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 107.

“sees participation in Christ as constituted by the *duplex gratia*.”<sup>106</sup> Billings further argues that the *duplex gratia* reinforces that salvation is *dynamic*, both a gift and a human response. Even in justification, the believer is not simply “passive.” Rather, through faith, “one ‘possesses’ Christ” and enters into “a new way of being and acting,” which is for Calvin more than a legal decree.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, sanctification is “living out the implications of this first grace in a Trinitarian context of adoption.”<sup>108</sup> For Calvin, participation in Christ “always involves a grateful fulfillment of the law of love, empowered by the life-giving Spirit. This participation takes place in the communal context of the church and its sacramental life, which is connected to an interrelated set of outwardly moving loves: mutual love in the church, love of neighbour, love of the needy, and love manifested through justice and equity in society.”<sup>109</sup> This point is one of Billings’ most striking contributions to the *unio–duplex gratia* discussion.

Billings argues that what is known as the “third use” of the law, a guide for believers, is the “primary role” for Calvin. “The original *telos* of the law is still the *telos* of the law for Christians: union with God.”<sup>110</sup> Yet sin has disrupted our ability to fulfill the law and secure for ourselves the promises of life conditioned upon obedience. Only by participating in Christ and his righteousness, Billings explains, are humans restored to primordial union with God.<sup>111</sup> By imputing Christ’s righteousness to sinners, “God is ‘supplying what is lacking to complete it,’ so that God ‘causes us to receive the benefit of the promises of the law as if we had fulfilled their condition.’”<sup>112</sup> Yet “believers [also] participate in Christ as the embodiment of the law, thus growing in obedience to the commandments through the Spirit. In this way, the gap between what humans ‘ought’ to do and what they ‘can’ do is bridged. Through the first grace of imputation the demands of the law are fulfilled (‘ought’), and the second grace gradually enables the believer to obey the law (‘can’).”<sup>113</sup> As one obeys the law by participating in Christ, not only is one’s union with God restored, but so is the *imago Dei* in the believer.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. Billings quotes *Inst.* 2.7.4 (1539), *OS* 3:330.

<sup>113</sup> Billings, *Calvin*, 150.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 158-159.

Calvin thus ascribes to the law a soteriological role, Billings argues. Like Garcia, Billings argues that Calvin believed salvation is a dynamic experience in which believers play an active role. Good works, therefore, are integral to God's plan to restore believers to relationship with him and to personal wholeness.

Peter Lillback likewise acknowledges that Calvin successfully relates justification and sanctification, though he focuses specifically on Calvin's concept of covenant. Contra interpreters who believe that Calvin did not hold a "covenantal" theology, as seen in later Calvinism, Lillback argues that Calvin "sees a relationship of Christ and the covenant in the application of redemption in such areas as faith, sonship, union with God and Christ, good works, and the sacraments."<sup>115</sup> Christ and covenant are connected in Calvin's theology because the covenant is Christ-centered—founded upon and containing Christ—and because Christ brings the benefits of the covenant to believers. While the covenant has many blessings, Lillback explains, Calvin pinpoints justification and sanctification as the "two members" of the covenant.<sup>116</sup> According to Lillback, the covenant organizes the benefits of salvation: God's forgiveness and the necessity of obedience in the lives of the faithful. So Lillback asks: "How can Calvin safeguard the unique instrumentality of faith in justification, or 'faith alone,' when sanctification's obedience is so closely attached?"<sup>117</sup>

Lillback, whom Garcia appreciates yet charitably criticizes,<sup>118</sup> argues that Calvin takes a mediating stance between the Romanists and the Libertines by employing a letter/spirit hermeneutic instead of a law/gospel one.<sup>119</sup> Lillback then concludes that Calvin, unlike Luther, was unwilling to say that the covenantal promises were nullified by the doctrine of justification *sola fide*.<sup>120</sup> Sensitive to covenant promises, and to scriptural evidence that the covenant and Christ are closely related, Calvin did not contrast law and gospel "after the blessings of the covenant [justification and

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<sup>115</sup> Lillback, *Binding of God*, 177-178.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 180; *Inst.* 3.20.45 (1559), *OS* 4:359.

<sup>117</sup> Lillback, *Binding of God*, 183.

<sup>118</sup> Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 30, believes Lillback overstates the importance of covenant in Calvin's theology. Others have not been so charitable in criticizing Lillback's study. E.g., David J. Engelsma, "The Recent Bondage of John Calvin: A Critique of Peter A. Lillback's *The Binding of God*," *PRTJ* 35 (November 2001), <http://www.prc.org/prtj/nov2001.html#ReviewArticle>, accessed 9 September 2019; Mark W. Karlberg, *Gospel Grace: The Modern-Day Controversy* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 219-220. Cf. Coxhead, "Justification by Works," 1.

<sup>119</sup> Lillback, *Binding of God*, 186.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 187.

sanctification] had been bestowed upon a believer.” Thus, Calvin taught that the “spirit” was added to the “letter” of the law. Because believers have been freely pardoned and regenerated, Lillback argues, they have “a true righteousness of obedience.” However, this righteousness is “a *subordinate* righteousness to the righteousness of Christ,” though “it is not a *contrary* righteousness.”<sup>121</sup> Calvin thus affirms a “works-righteousness” that is connected though subordinated to faith-righteousness, “because of the mutual and inseparable character of the benefits of the covenant.”<sup>122</sup> A works-righteousness is *imputed* to believers’ works, meaning God considers their works righteous because they have been freely justified. Lillback also argues that Calvin affirms *inherent* righteousness—sanctification. Thus, Lillback detects several types of righteousness in Calvin’s thought. He claims that righteousness is imputed to believers by faith alone, yet also to their good works. The righteousness imputed to believers’ works Lillback labels “works-righteousness” because that righteousness comes by faith *and* obedience to the law. Yet in a potentially confusing manner, Lillback also calls this righteousness “inherent” (sanctification) which is distinguished from imputed righteousness (justification). Lillback is unclear whether believers’ works, performed in obedience to the law, are accepted by God on account of imputed righteousness, inherent righteous, or both. Yet Lillback is clear in stating that Calvin affirmed an inferior righteousness according to works that is connected yet subordinated to the superior righteousness that comes by faith.

Building upon Lillback’s study, Steven Coxhead argues that Calvin’s letter/spirit hermeneutic allows him to identify “a *subordinate* righteousness . . . that is imputed to the believer’s works,” which operates in tandem with the righteousness of Christ without detracting from justification *sola fide*.<sup>123</sup> In a 2008 article, Coxhead analyzes Calvin’s Ezekiel 18 commentary and states that Calvin understands *righteousness* in Ezekiel 18, especially as detailed in verses 5-9, as obedience to the law.<sup>124</sup> Accordingly, believers are reckoned righteous on account of their holiness. Further,

The truth of justification by faith does not render justification by the law totally superfluous because the gift of regeneration accompanies the gift of imputation. In other words, there is a legitimate sense in Calvin’s understanding in which the concept of justification by the law or justification by works can be applied to believers following the pattern of Scripture, which applies the language of

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 188 (emphasis original).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>123</sup> Coxhead, “Justification by Works,” 1; Lillback, *Binding of God*, 188-189, 205.

<sup>124</sup> Coxhead, “Works Righteousness,” 307.

justification by works to those individuals who are recipients of the regenerating work of God's Spirit.<sup>125</sup>

Calvin's understanding of works-righteousness, therefore, is not limited to the hermeneutic of despair, Coxhead argues. Rather, "Calvin understands that the category of the righteous is a populated set and that the promised rewards are really received by believers."<sup>126</sup> For Calvin, Coxhead contends, obeying the law is actually possible for believers. But, Coxhead clarifies, Calvin does not teach that believers are able to walk in perfect accordance to God's precepts, because they still struggle with sin. Rather, Calvin understands the type of obedience mentioned in Ezekiel 18 as "one that consists of *faithfulness* and *sincerity* in serving God rather than the perfect keeping of the law per se."<sup>127</sup> Thus, "Calvin argues that Scripture can speak of people being justified by works, not because of any intrinsic perfection of the works or person of the one so justified, but because the perfection of Christ, with whom the believer is united by faith, justifies the imperfect works of the believer."<sup>128</sup>

Coxhead develops his thesis more thoroughly in a follow-up article, extending his analysis to the *Institutio* and other commentaries. Coxhead affirms that *iustitia* is inextricably linked with *iustificatio* and that being accounted righteous is what it means to be justified.<sup>129</sup> He further argues that Calvin's understanding of *iustitia* in connection to human works cannot be reduced to his understanding of *absolute* righteousness—namely, righteousness derived from perfect fulfillment of the law. While Calvin certainly speaks of righteousness in this manner when expounding the hypothetical possibility of justification by works and thus the necessity of justification *sola fide*, he also teaches the concept of *relative* righteousness, what Coxhead calls "covenant obedience" or "covenant righteousness."<sup>130</sup> Coxhead explains,

Covenant righteousness is the right standing before God that a member of the covenant enjoys on the basis of covenant obedience or loyalty, which consists of a genuine commitment to living one's life in accordance with God's word. Even though Calvin stresses the idea of absolute righteousness in his system of theology, it is nevertheless highly significant that he acknowledges a concept of

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 308 (emphasis added).

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>129</sup> Coxhead, "Justification by Works," 14.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 11

relative righteousness which is performed by believers in the context of covenant grace.<sup>131</sup>

Coxhead finds two types of justification in Calvin's thought: one that is superior, apprehended by faith, and one that is subordinate, resulting from a life of obedience grounded in faith-union with Christ. The first is justification *sola fide*. Because no one can fulfill the law, no one can be justified by works. This is why, Coxhead explains, Calvin speaks of absolute righteousness in a hypothetical manner: justification proper comes by living righteously and thus fulfilling the law perfectly, yet sin has made this impossible for humans, except Christ. However, those to whom Christ's perfect righteousness has been imputed are made members of the covenant; and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, they are able to live righteously according to God's law. Even though believers are able to obey God's precepts only partially or relatively—which is less than what God requires for justification proper—God graciously reckons their good works as just.<sup>132</sup> Thus, for Coxhead, the fact that Calvin states that God accepts or reckons as righteous the works of believers, within the context where justification *sola fide* already exists, means that he affirms a subordinate doctrine of justification by works.

One may wonder whether Coxhead has misread Calvin at various points and consequently misunderstood what is commonly called his concept of “double justification”—that not only are believers justified, but so are their works.<sup>133</sup> To say that believers' *works* are justified is different from saying that believers *themselves* are justified on account of their works. Despite apparent confusion at times in Coxhead's study, he nevertheless raises insightful questions regarding Calvin's understanding of *iustitia* and whether he ascribed a causal relationship between believers' good works and divine acceptance.

### 1.2.3. Good Works and Divine Acceptance

Whether Calvin taught that believers are accepted on account of their works may seem an easy question to answer, for a surplus of data in his *corpus* suggests that he vehemently rejected any notion that God accepts humans on account of their works. Yet several scholars have sought to nuance this understanding by highlighting Calvin's concept of “double acceptance.” George Hunsinger demonstrates that Calvin correlates

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>133</sup> See *Inst.* 3.17.10 (1543), *OS* 4:263. This theme in Calvin's theology will be discussed in chapter 3.

the *duplex gratia* not with a single but a double divine acceptance. Calvin sees two modes of divine acceptance in Scripture, Hunsinger explains, one based on justification, the other on sanctification. According to Hunsinger, Calvin teaches not only that sanctification accompanies justification, but also that one's acceptance *coram Deo* rests not on justification alone. A second, complimentary basis for acceptance is the actual righteousness of our own lives, our sanctification.<sup>134</sup> Hunsinger further states that to make "a second mode or basis of acceptance" plausible, Calvin has to adopt "lines of argument that come perilously close to the Roman Catholic ideas that the Reformation had set out to overcome."<sup>135</sup> Yet Hunsinger remarks that Calvin surrounds his teaching with heavy qualifications in order to safeguard *sola fide*. Thus, Hunsinger explains, Calvin rejects any notion of merit and bases this second acceptance ultimately upon God's grace at work within the believer.<sup>136</sup>

Even with such qualifications, Hunsinger argues, Calvin's double acceptance is underdeveloped and inconsistent with his teachings elsewhere. He senses that Calvin's rejection of merit and careful regulation of justification *sola fide* should contradict his suggested second mode of acceptance. Hunsinger also wonders whether Calvin affirms the Thomistic idea that when God gives us grace, he makes us worthy.<sup>137</sup> (Calvin abhors the idea that believers or their works are intrinsically worthy.) By Hunsinger's assessment, Calvin introduces asymmetry into his understanding of divine acceptance by suggesting an acceptance based on sanctification. Hunsinger questions whether Calvin, in expounding a double acceptance, successfully reconciles perceived tensions in Scripture, or whether he simply juxtaposes conflicting theological ideas without coherently relating them. Further, though not explicitly addressed therein, Hunsinger's study raises the question of whether Calvin understands justification as a continuum. The notion of a second acceptance, contingent upon the efforts of believers wrought by

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<sup>134</sup> Hunsinger, "Two Simultaneities," 320.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 321-322.

<sup>137</sup> While not stating that Calvin embraces this precise Thomistic idea, Charles Raith II, "Abraham and the Reformation: Romans 4 and the Theological Interpretation of Aquinas and Calvin," *JTI* 5.2 (2011): 298, recognizes that Calvin affirms the Augustinian notion of "grace for grace"—"that God rewards the right use of earlier grace with the gift of later graces." Cf. *idem.*, *After Merit: Calvin's Theology of Works and Rewards* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 144. In his 2011 article, Raith questions after comparing Aquinas and Calvin, "Could it be that Aquinas offers the Reformed tradition a way to temper the strong juxtaposition between justification by faith and justification by works without at all detracting from the rightful emphasis it gives to centrality of Christ's justice for justification?" (300). While I will not compare Calvin with Aquinas, I will demonstrate that Calvin indeed affirms a form of justification by works that does not detract from justification *sola fide*.

the inner working of the Spirit, could imply that justification, while not progressive, is not necessarily a one-off event.

Anthony Lane offers a more positive interpretation of Calvin's double acceptance. Building upon Hunsinger, Lane argues that while Calvin rejects any inherent value of works, he holds a doctrine of "justification by worthless works."<sup>138</sup> Calvin not only speaks frequently of God's gracious acceptance of believers' good works (justification *of* works), Lane explains, but also states that believers themselves, who have already been accepted by God on account of Christ's merits, are accepted by God on account of their own good works (justification *by* works). Lane thus detects a paradox in Calvin's thought: justification *sola fide* and justification by (imperfect) good works. Whereas Hunsinger expresses bafflement as to why Calvin would describe works as a mode of divine acceptance and as "inferior causes" of salvation, Lane argues that he did so due to his commitment to Scripture, to accommodate passages that speak of works as reasons why God blesses believers. Lane even suggests that Calvin's concept of double acceptance is not that different from the Tridentine notion of acceptance on the basis of infused, or imparted, righteousness. Although Lane states that Calvin himself does not explicitly state that believers are justified by works, he argues that "acceptance 'by reason of works' can mean nothing else."<sup>139</sup>

### 1.3. The Place of This Study

There is no shortage of literature on Calvin's understanding of faith and works, specifically his concept of the *duplex gratia*. Many scholars now agree that Calvin successfully relates justification and sanctification. Moreover, the general consensus indicates that because Calvin describes justification and sanctification as distinct yet inseparable, he sees an inextricable link between imputed and imparted righteousness. Good works, therefore, are not an appendage to the Christian life. Yet what precise role does Calvin ascribe to good works in the lives of believers? Do good works simply prove justification? Do they possess soteriological value? Does Calvin teach a notion of divine acceptance on account of works? Even among those who argue that Calvin does, not all (e.g., Hunsinger) see how such a notion accords with his other statements

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<sup>138</sup> Lane, "The Role of Scripture," 382. Lane points to Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 135, who also highlights this theme.

<sup>139</sup> Lane, "The Role of Scripture," 382. Lane and Coxhead are not the only interpreters to recently argue that Calvin teaches a form of justification by works. While I will engage additional interpreters in chapter 3, I have highlighted Lane and Coxhead here because their contributions are some of the more articulate to date.



regarding faith and works. And while the studies conducted by Lillback, Coxhead, Hunsinger, and Lane are helpful, they remain only short-length surveys. A full-length study on Calvin's understanding of works-righteousness is still lacking.

This study fills that gap. Calvin conceived of a positive relationship between *iustitia fidei* and *iustitia operum*, for salvation is a dynamic experience in which believers are restored to righteousness, both situationally and experientially. Moreover, this study will inquire not only the *what*, but also the *why* and *how* of Calvin's positive notion of works-righteousness. I will discuss not simply what he says regarding believers' works-righteousness, but also why and how he formulated such a notion. One "why," as Lane argues, is that Calvin was committed to understanding and expounding Scripture, even those parts that did not easily align with certain Reformation concerns. Consequently, one "how" relates to whether, and the extent to which, Calvin successfully relates works-righteousness to faith-righteousness. Does he simply juxtapose logically incompatible ideas? Or does he successfully relate the two themes? If so, by what means? Another "how" regards Calvin's theological priorities. If Calvin did not simply formulate *ad hoc* statements to accommodate those passages that presented difficulties to the Protestant understanding of justification *sola fide*, how, if at all, does his positive notion of works-righteousness relate to other themes in his theology? And if believers grow in experiential righteousness and are accepted by God on account of their works, how is it that they do so? Moreover, what sort of works must they perform to attain works-righteousness?

This study is not concerned with appraising the merits of Calvin's positive notion of works-righteousness, or whether his teaching is consistent with Scripture or later Reformed theology. This study is historical-exegetical, focused on what Calvin himself taught in his own context. I will focus predominantly on what he says in his *Institutio* and commentaries, but also in his treatises, catechisms, and sermons—all of which contain important data for understanding what he believed Scripture teaches regarding works-righteousness.

Moving forward, we will first explore Calvin's anthropology. Chapter 2 lays the necessary groundwork for understanding Calvin's positive notion of works-righteousness by establishing his teaching on human nature and ability. We will then turn to his understanding of works-righteousness within the Christian life. Chapter 3 explores the relation between good works and divine acceptance, demonstrating that Calvin espouses a notion of personal righteousness that is a basis for divine acceptance. Chapter 4 explores the soteriological value of good works, showing that God uses good

works positively in the lives of believers, who are reckoned righteous ultimately on account of Christ's righteousness but also on account of their own righteousness. Chapter 5 establishes the content of good works, explaining what good works *are* by looking at the law's relation to the Christian life. And chapter 6, our conclusion, briefly summarizes our discoveries and analyzes Calvin's theological method and the extent to which he successfully relates the seemingly conflicting themes of works-righteousness and faith-righteousness. This study not only seeks to relay a more accurate understanding of Calvin's teaching on the Christian life, specifically his understanding of works-righteousness, but also to contribute fresh perspectives for the scholarly discussions surveyed in this chapter.

## Chapter 2

### Human Nature and Ability

To retrieve Calvin's positive notion of works-righteousness, we must first understand his teaching on human nature and ability. As Mary Potter Engel states, anthropology "is neither an afterword nor a second-class doctrine in [Calvin's] thought, but rather a constant and primary focus. If one neglects Calvin's anthropology, therefore, one fails to understand a fundamental and pervasive element of his entire theology."<sup>1</sup> Yet as she notes, studies on Calvin's anthropology have been subject to conflict and confusion that reflect the conflict and confusion among scholars regarding his theology in general.<sup>2</sup>

Calvin is famous for his allegedly despondent anthropology. His teachings on total depravity, human inability, and divine sovereignty have led many to believe he propagated, in I. John Hesselink's words, a "pessimistic view of human nature and its possibilities."<sup>3</sup> One such interpretation of Calvin is espoused by Margaret Miles. According to Miles, Calvin's central theological interest was to heighten God's glory. Thus, "Calvin used the human race as a foil: all human faculties are vitiated and corrupted, all human works less than useless toward human salvation."<sup>4</sup>

Miles's assessment of Calvin's methodology is not totally amiss. As she demonstrates, Calvin emphasizes human depravity to highlight God's glory: "Our humility is his loftiness."<sup>5</sup> Further, Calvin frequently stresses the importance of acknowledging our misery before God, which is integral to faith and thus requisite for

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Potter Engel, *Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), ix.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., ix-x. Though Potter Engel rightly highlights the importance of Calvin's anthropology, her main thesis has been challenged. She detects in Calvin conflicting statements on human nature and ability—some optimistic, others pessimistic—arguing that they can be explained from the vantage of two different perspectives: one divine and absolute, the other human and relative. For counters to her work, see Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 257; and Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 88-89.

<sup>3</sup> I. John Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary, Featuring Ford Lewis Battles's Translation of the 1538 Catechism* (Louisville: WJKP, 1997), 61. Hereafter cited at *1538 Catechism*.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Ruth Miles, "Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*," *HTR* 74 (1981): 304.

<sup>5</sup> *Inst.* 2.2.11 (1539), *OS* 3:254, which Miles, "Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body," 304, cites. Cf. Louis A. Vos, "Calvin and the Christian Self-Image; God's Noble Workmanship, a Wretched Worm, or a New Creature," in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. David E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976): 98: "knowledge of man in sin is never an end in itself. . . . Its purpose is to lead one to grace."

justification.<sup>6</sup> And Calvin adamantly opposes the “partly-partly” schema, as Charles Raith describes it, that he detected in his Catholic opponents—a framework in which salvation results partly from God’s activity and partly from the believer’s.<sup>7</sup> The idea that human works complete God’s or that human righteousness adds to Christ’s disgusted Calvin. He believed that even the saintliest of Christians are unable to fulfill God’s law and that any human contribution undermines the sufficiency of Christ’s salvific work.

Still, Miles casts a portrait of Calvin that insufficiently accounts for the entire framework of his anthropology.<sup>8</sup> When adjudicating whether Calvin is pessimistic about human nature and ability, one needs to assess whether his statements under investigation are about humanity *pre lapsum*, *post lapsum*, or during redemption.<sup>9</sup> Even then, one must consider the full arch of Calvin’s theological anthropology. Jason Van Vliet, who also finds Miles’ conclusions problematic, rightly notes, “The framework of Calvin’s [anthropology] is stretched out along the timeline of redemptive history.”<sup>10</sup> Calvin himself states that true knowledge of ourselves is twofold: “what we were like when we were first created and what our condition became after the fall of Adam.”<sup>11</sup> And he speaks of salvation as including restoration of what was lost in Adam. For Calvin, creation, fall, redemption, and the future glory must be held together to rightly understand both humanity’s condition apart from God and the position and condition to which God has restored humanity.<sup>12</sup> Interpreters who focus mostly on Calvin’s comments regarding unregenerate humans, or even Christians as divided beings, will understandably conclude that he espouses a pessimistic anthropology and allows

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<sup>6</sup> See *Inst.* 2.2.10 (1539), *OS* 3:253; *Inst.* 3.4.6 (1536), *OS* 4:92; *Inst.* 3.4.10 (1536, 1543), *OS* 4:97; *Inst.* 3.20.12 (1559/1539), *OS* 4:312; *Comm. Rom.* 5:20, *COR II/XIII*:116; “Calvin’s Reply to Sadoleto” (1539), in *A Reformation Debate*, ed. John C. Olin (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1966) 66, *OS* 1:469.

<sup>7</sup> Raith, *After Merit*, especially 69-81, is particularly helpful for understanding Calvin’s critique of this schema, and discussions in this chapter and the next regarding Calvin’s rejection of the schema is influenced by Raith’s work.

<sup>8</sup> Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 16, observes that Miles focuses predominantly on Calvin’s treatment of postlapsarian humanity and thus fails to understand the fullness of his anthropology.

<sup>9</sup> See *ibid.*, 129

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 163; cf. 153; Potter Engel, *Calvin’s Perspectival Anthropology*, 2-3; Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, “Human Dignity and Human Justice: Thinking with Calvin about the Imago Dei,” *TB* 66.1 (2015): 125-133.

<sup>11</sup> *Inst.* 1.15.1 (1559), *OS* 3:173. Cf. Randall Zachman, “‘Deny Yourself and Take up Your Cross’: John Calvin on the Christian Life,” *IJST* 11.4 (October 2009): 467.

<sup>12</sup> *Argumentum* in *Comm. Gen.*, p.64, *CO* 23:11-12.

humans little to no agency in salvation. For humans, there is “nothing to do . . . nothing to be,” as Miles states.<sup>13</sup>

One likely reason such commentators fail to acknowledge the full arch of Calvin’s anthropology is, as Brian Gerrish explains, “the systematic coherence of Calvin’s anthropology tends to get buried under the sheer mass of dogmatic material.”<sup>14</sup> If we wish to understand Calvin’s anthropology, we must gaze upon the larger horizon of his work. Gerrish explains, “Nothing less than the whole of the *Institutes* is required to set out [Calvin’s] doctrine of man, just as the work as a whole presents his doctrine of God.”<sup>15</sup> While this is true, interpreters must also consult Calvin’s other works, for the *Institutio* alone does not contain all that Calvin taught regarding human nature and ability.

It would be erroneous, however, to suggest that most Calvin scholars interpret his anthropology negatively. Some have offered more temperate portraits than what Miles has sketched.<sup>16</sup> This chapter continues that trend. Exploring the trajectory of Calvin’s anthropology along the line of redemptive history, we will highlight the participatory dimensions of his anthropology, showing that there is indeed something for humans to do and be—that they are real casual agents in pursuing and performing righteousness—when they are relationally connected to the Creator and Redeemer. We will thus provide not only a more accurate portrayal of Calvin’s anthropology, but also lay the necessary groundwork for understanding his positive notion of works-righteousness.

## 2.1. Original Humanity

Calvin states that in the account of man’s creation, God “testifies that he is about to undertake something great and wonderful.” God was about to not simply finish creation

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<sup>13</sup> Miles, “Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body,” 305.

<sup>14</sup> B.A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New* (Chicago: UCP, 1982), 150.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Cf. Vos, “The Christian Self-Image,” 80, who argues that one must consider “the overall instruction of Calvin” to find his true view of humanity.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., Luke Anderson, “*Imago Dei* in Calvin and Bernard,” in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae professor: Calvin as confessor of Holy Scripture*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994): 178-198; Billings, *Calvin*; J. Faber, *Essays in Reformed Doctrine* (Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Pub., 1990), 227-281; Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New*, 150-159; Anthony N.S. Lane, “Anthropology,” *Calvin Handbook*, 275-288; idem., “Did Calvin Believe in Free Will?” *VE* 12 (1981): 72-90; Raith, *After Merit*; Van Vliet, *Children of God*; idem., “The Freed Will: Can Augustine Teach Us to See Calvin in a New Light?” in *Learning from the Past: Essays on Reception, Catholicity, and Dialogue in Honour of Anthony N. S. Lane*, eds. Jon Balserak and Richard Snoddy (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015): 21-32; Vos, “The Christian Self-Image”; Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 151.

but also make a creature that would surpass all the others. In the divine consultation, “Let us make man,” God is not pausing over a difficult work but “commending to our attention the dignity of our nature.”<sup>17</sup> For “in our uncorrupted nature, there was nothing but what was honourable.”<sup>18</sup> We were made in God’s image, upright and pure.<sup>19</sup> So closely are humanity and the *imago Dei* connected in Calvin’s mind that he asserts we can truly understand ourselves only when we first recognize that our primal parents were created in God’s image.<sup>20</sup> While human nature and the *imago Dei* are not synonymous for Calvin, they cannot be properly understood apart from one another.

Fundamentally, being made in God’s image means humans were endowed with faculties that marked them as the noblest creatures. Unmistakably dualist, Calvin teaches that human nature consists of body and soul, with the latter being “an immortal yet created essence.”<sup>21</sup> Calvin admits that the body reflects God’s glory, but that the soul is the “proper seat of [God’s] image.”<sup>22</sup> One reason Calvin ascribes priority to the soul, especially in relation to the *imago Dei*, is that God is spirit.<sup>23</sup> Another reason is humans, as God’s image bearers, were made to partake of God’s “wisdom, justice, and goodness,” which for Calvin are immaterial qualities.<sup>24</sup>

Like many of his theological ancestors, Calvin understands the soul to consist of the mind and will.<sup>25</sup> *Pre lapsum*, the mind could distinguish between right and wrong,

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<sup>17</sup> *Comm. Gen.* 1:26, *CO* 23:25.

<sup>18</sup> *Comm. Gen.* 2:25, *CO* 23:51.

<sup>19</sup> *Inst.* 1.15.1 (1539,1559), *OS* 3:173-174.

<sup>20</sup> *Inst.* 2.1.1 (1559), *OS* 3:228.

<sup>21</sup> *Inst.* 1.15.2 (1559), *OS* 3:174.

<sup>22</sup> *Inst.* 1.15.3 (1559), *OS* 3:176. Calvin also calls the soul the “nobler part” (*Inst.* 1.15.2 [1559], *OS* 3:174). Cf. *Comm. Gen.* 1:26, *CO* 23:26, wherein he states that God’s image was eminent in the mind and heart, though there was no part of man in which “some scintillations of [the divine image] did not shine forth.” However, Calvin did not always teach that the body reflects God’s glory. In *Psychopannychia* (1542), He teaches that God’s image shines forth exclusively in the soul (*Tracts* 3:423-425, *CO* 5:181-182; cf. Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 67-68). While much could be written about Calvin’s view of the body, it is outside the focus of this study to examine his teachings on the topic.

<sup>23</sup> See *Psychopannychia* in *Tracts* 3:424, *CO* 5:181.

<sup>24</sup> *Psychopannychia* in *Tracts* 3:424, *CO* 5:181. This is why Calvin says “the image of God . . . is spiritual” (*Inst.* 1.15.3 [1559], *OS* 3:177). Cf. Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 68.

<sup>25</sup> Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 34-62, surveys theologians from different eras, concluding that many of them “generally agree that the image of God consists of intellect and choice since, by using these two faculties, the human soul best reflects the Creator who reveals truth and who is free to choose” (60), though he states that Calvin did not teach that the *imago Dei* consists wholly in intellect and will (124-125). See Calvin, *Inst.* 1.15.7 (1539), *OS* 3:185; *Inst.* 1.15.8 (1559), *OS* 3:185.

and the will was able to choose what the mind deemed suitable and to reject what it deemed unsuitable. Calvin thus ascribes priority to the mind, calling it “the leader and governor of the soul.”<sup>26</sup> Further, “man in his first condition excelled in these pre-eminent endowments, so that his reason, understanding, prudence, and judgment not only sufficed for the direction of his earthly life, but by them men mounted up even to God and eternal bliss. Then was choice added, to direct the appetites and control all the organic motions, and thus make the will completely amenable to the guidance of reason.”<sup>27</sup> Calvin means not that the will obeys reason of necessity, as if it were bound or determined.<sup>28</sup> Rather, in his upright state, “man by free will [*libero arbitrio*] had the power, if he so willed [*vellet*], to attain eternal life.” The will was “capable of being bent to one side or the other”—toward good or evil.<sup>29</sup> Although his will was pliable, man was created with a disposition toward the good,<sup>30</sup> though he was not created perfect. “The image of God,” Calvin admits, “was only shadowed forth in man till he should arrive at his perfection.”<sup>31</sup> Humans, therefore, were created to progress toward a specific, achievable goal, provided they use their natural faculties well. We were given understanding so “by leading a holy and upright life, we may press on to the appointed goal of blessed immortality.”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, “the principal point of wisdom is a well-regulated sobriety in obedience to God.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, while Calvin ascribes priority to the mind and teaches that the will is amenable to it, he does not mean that God’s intention for humanity is simply intellectual ascent. Knowledge and understanding inform the will and desires so God might be honored in obedience and worship.

At creation, humans were also endowed with supernatural or adventitious gifts, which are accidental to human nature.<sup>34</sup> In his Genesis commentary, Calvin pinpoints *tres gradus* in the creation of man: “that his dead body was formed out of the dust of the earth; that it was endued with a soul, whence it should receive vital motion; and that on

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<sup>26</sup> *Inst.* 1.15.7 (1539), *OS* 3:185. Melancthon, *CTT* 56, *CR* 21:653, similarly implies priority of the mind.

<sup>27</sup> *Inst.* 1.15.8 (1559), *OS* 3:185-186.

<sup>28</sup> Lane, “Did Calvin Believe in Free Will,” 73.

<sup>29</sup> *Inst.* 1.15.8 (1559), *OS* 3:186.

<sup>30</sup> See *Serm. Gen.* 1:26-28 (1:97), *SC* XI/I:60.

<sup>31</sup> *Comm. Gen.* 1:26, *CO* 23:27.

<sup>32</sup> *Inst.* 2.1.1 (1559), *OS* 3:228-229.

<sup>33</sup> *Comm. Gen.* 3:5, *CO* 23:59.

<sup>34</sup> See Paul Helm, *Calvin at the Centre* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 308-339.

this soul God engraved his own image, to which immortality is annexed.”<sup>35</sup> While Calvin identifies the soul as the chief seat of God’s image, and even teaches that the soul itself reflects God’s glory, he distinguishes between the endowment of the soul and God’s act of engraving his image upon it. Thus, while the soul and its faculties truly reflect God’s glory, the *imago Dei* is more properly connected to those gifts that are accidental to human nature and thus elevate it.<sup>36</sup> This is evident in that the supernatural gift of immortality is “annexed” to the divine image.

While Calvin does not provide a list of these gifts, we gather from various places that they include “immortality;”<sup>37</sup> “wisdom, justice, and goodness;”<sup>38</sup> “faith, love of God, charity toward neighbor, zeal for holiness and for righteousness.”<sup>39</sup> It appears that the supernatural gifts enabled the natural gifts to function as God intended. Thus, while humans were created with faculties that enabled them to obey God and eventually attain immortality, the ability to do so did not reside *in se*. Calvin connects the gifts of righteousness and holiness to man’s ability to judge rightly and for his will and senses to function in accord with wisdom.<sup>40</sup> The natural gifts by themselves, therefore, were insufficient for leading humans to obey God and obtain eternal bliss.<sup>41</sup> But this does not mean the natural gifts in their original state were defective (corrupt). Calvin affirms that human nature was created good.<sup>42</sup> Neither does it mean that man existed for a time without the supernatural gifts.<sup>43</sup> Calvin does not suggest that gradations two and three of man’s creation are chronological, though he does seem to ascribe logical priority to the natural gifts. The existence of the soul is requisite to the *imago Dei* being engraved upon it.

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<sup>35</sup> *Comm. Gen. 2:7, CO 23:35-36. Cf. Inst. 1.15.3 (1559), OS 3:178, wherein Calvin states that man received “engraved marks of [God’s] likeness.”*

<sup>36</sup> Anderson, “*Imago Dei*,” 181. Cf. North Barry Dancy, “The Transformed Individual and His Social Responsibility in the Thought of John Calvin” (PhD Dissertation, Temple University, 1972), 31.

<sup>37</sup> *Comm. Gen. 2:7, CO 23:36.*

<sup>38</sup> *Psychopannychia* in *Tracts* 3:425, *CO* 5:181. Cf. *Comm. Col. 3:10, COR II/XVI:449*: “wisdom, righteousness, and goodness.”

<sup>39</sup> *Inst. 2.2.12 (1559), OS 3:255. Cf. BLW 46-47, COR IV/III:115*: “righteousness, truth, and wisdom.” Melancthon, *CTT* 79, *CR* 21:675, mentions similar qualities (“a firm knowledge of God, wisdom, righteousness”) when describing “the gifts of a perfect nature.”

<sup>40</sup> *Comm. Gen. 1:26, CO 23:26.*

<sup>41</sup> Contra Raith, *After Merit*, 120, who asserts that prelapsarian humanity could “fulfill the law *by virtue of its natural abilities*” (emphasis original).

<sup>42</sup> See *Comm. Gen. 1:26, CO 23:25.*

<sup>43</sup> Helm, *Calvin at the Centre*, 319.



While Calvin often states that humans possess the adventitious gifts, he also uses language such as *partake*,<sup>44</sup> indicating that the first humans existed not autonomously apart from God but participated in the divine reality.<sup>45</sup> Further, the presence of supernatural gifts, as Paul Helm notes, is “all or nothing”<sup>46</sup>—the qualities that God has chosen to communicate to humans are fully present *pre lapsum*. This does not mean, however, that “if [the gifts] are present they cannot grow or develop.”<sup>47</sup> For example, Calvin asserts that humans were created “to cultivate righteousness [*ad colendam iustitiam*].”<sup>48</sup> In employing *colo*, which denotes “tilling,” Calvin indicates that the gift of righteousness could be developed. That this was likely the case for all the supernatural gifts is evidenced in his admission that the *imago Dei* “was only shadowed forth in man till he should arrive at his perfection.” Calvin affirms not only that humans could progress, but that God’s image in them could develop as well.

Interpreting Genesis 1:26 in light of Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:23, Calvin explains that the divine image was made “to consist in ‘righteousness and true holiness.’”<sup>49</sup> While “not the whole of God’s image,” these qualities are the “chief part” or a “synecdoche” of it. Calvin reinforces this idea in his Ephesians commentary, wherein he explains that holiness and righteousness are the chief qualities promoted in the Decalogue, which encapsulates the life God intended for humans.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, he connects reflecting divine righteousness in particular to being made in God’s image.<sup>51</sup> This is further evident when we recall that humanity was made to cultivate righteousness, a principle that humans recognize even after the fall.<sup>52</sup> Such cultivating was not simply one good endeavor among many, for Calvin asserts that in man’s original state ““nothing is better than to practice righteousness by obeying God’s

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<sup>44</sup> See *Psychopannychia* in *Tracts* 3:424, *CO* 5:181. Cf. Richard R. Topping, “John Calvin and the Image of God: Creation, Regeneration, Remnants, and Rights,” *Touchstone* (February 2016): 7.

<sup>45</sup> See Raith, *After Merit*, 69, who demonstrates that Calvin opposed any notion that humans are “causally autonomous or independent of divine activity” (cf. 70, 112, 176), though he focuses primarily on humans *post lapsum* rather than at creation. Cf. Vos, “The Christian Self-Image,” 103.

<sup>46</sup> Helm, *Calvin at the Centre*, 318, 321.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>48</sup> *Inst.* 1.15.6 (1559), *OS* 3:182.

<sup>49</sup> *Comm.* Gen. 1:26, *CO* 23:26.

<sup>50</sup> See *Comm.* Eph. 4:24, *COR II/XVI*:245-246.

<sup>51</sup> *Comm.* Eph. 4:24, *COR II/XVI*:245.

<sup>52</sup> *Inst.* 1.15.6 (1559), *OS* 3:182-183.

commandments; then, that the ultimate goal of the happy life is to be loved by him.”<sup>53</sup> Moreover, in *Institutio* 2.1.6, Calvin connects *iustitia* to *vita*, suggesting that the latter is a logical, though not temporal, consequence of the former. Later, he asserts that nothing is acceptable to God except “righteousness, innocence, and purity,”<sup>54</sup> and that “righteousness and holiness alone are acceptable.”<sup>55</sup> And in describing original sin, Calvin admits that we lack “original righteousness,” though he teaches that we must also acknowledge sin’s full power: “our nature is not only destitute and empty of good, but so fertile and fruitful of every evil that it cannot be idle.”<sup>56</sup> Calvin thus ascribes priority not only to righteousness and holiness, but specifically to righteousness when expounding the supernatural gifts, yet in a manner that is not hierarchical, as if righteousness excels over the others, but synecdochical.

Imaging God also means living in a state of integrity: “The integrity with which Adam was endowed is expressed by this word, when he had full possession of right understanding, when he had his affections kept within the bounds of reason, all senses tempered and in right order, and he truly referred all his excellence to exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his Maker.”<sup>57</sup> *Pre lapsum*, the mind and will, soul and body existed and functioned harmoniously. What caused the natural faculties to operate harmoniously was not just that they were created good, but that they were regulated by the supernatural gifts.<sup>58</sup> Further, by using *integritas* in reference to man’s original state, Calvin means not simply that man’s faculties were unified, but also that his being was complete, sound, without blemish.<sup>59</sup> Every part of the human self was upright and functioned as God intended.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, man held a proper view of himself, recognizing that “his excellence” could be credited to God alone.

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<sup>53</sup> *Inst.* 2.1.4 (1559), *OS* 3:232.

<sup>54</sup> *Inst.* 2.1.8 (1539), *OS* 3:237.

<sup>55</sup> *Inst.* 2.2.25 (1539), *OS* 3:268.

<sup>56</sup> *Inst.* 2.1.8 (mainly 1536), *OS* 3:238. Melancthon, *Romans* 133, *CR* 15:623, also admits that original sin includes lack of original righteousness, which also seems to be synecdochical—it consists in *acceptatio*, *integritas*, and *rectitudo*, which lead to *perfectam obedientiam legi Dei*.

<sup>57</sup> *Inst.* 1.15.3 (1559), *OS* 3:178. Cf. *Comm.* Gen. 1:26, *CO* 23:27, wherein Calvin speaks of *perfectio* rather than *integritas*.

<sup>58</sup> *Comm.* Gen. 1:26, *CO* 23:26. Cf. Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 93.

<sup>59</sup> See *Brief Confession* in *Tracts* 2:131, *CO* 9:724; Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 112-113.

<sup>60</sup> This does not mean that the natural gifts *in se* were created defective and were later made sound by the adventitious gifts. Calvin does not envisage a time when Adam, as an animate soul, existed without the supernatural gifts.

In the 1536 *Institutio*, Calvin explains that original humanity “was endowed with wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and was *so clinging by these gifts of grace to God*.”<sup>61</sup> The supernatural gifts not only regulated the natural faculties and elevated human nature so that humans might attain eternal glory, but also were the manner by which humans communed with God. Calvin does not suggest, however, that communion was the result of possessing supernatural gifts, but that the possession of such gifts and communion were tandem realities.

Calvin describes the creation of Adam as a progressive act in which God is near. Unlike the animals that “arose out of the earth in a moment,” Adam was “gradually formed” by God and thus given “peculiar dignity.”<sup>62</sup> The *tres gradus* of man’s creation are described as a hands-on event, as it were, on God’s part.<sup>63</sup> Whether Calvin understands man’s creation to be communion *qua talis* is unclear and probably unlikely, at least until “man became a living soul” with the *imago Dei* engraved upon him. It is the soul that animates man and gives him the ability to comprehend and relate to God. What is clear, though, is that Calvin does not envisage a time when man as a living soul did not commune with God. The supernatural gifts, therefore, appear to be the *manner*, not the *cause*, of communion. This means that man, once possessing adventitious gifts, did not have to progress in order to commune with God, though it does appear that he was created to progress into deeper and more intimate communion with God. Further, it seems that communion with God is not simply the goal of humanity but also the way in which humans received grace. Calvin explains that “communication with God was the source of life to Adam.”<sup>64</sup> Communion, therefore, is the *source* of the gifts—both natural and supernatural—and their *goal*.<sup>65</sup>

Charles Partee aptly remarks that in Calvin’s anthropology, the human and divine cannot be separated, stating that “some contemporary scholars extrapolate

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<sup>61</sup> *Inst.* 1536, 15, *OS* 1:38. Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 74, rightly recognizes, “It is not merely the *what* of the *imago Dei* which is worthy of attention, but also the *unto what*. Gifts are usually given with a certain purpose in mind, and that is certainly the case with the gift of the *imago Dei*. God intended human beings to use their excellent endowments – such as wisdom, righteousness, and holiness – in order to both admire and honor him, the generous Giver” (emphasis original).

<sup>62</sup> *Comm.* Gen. 2:7, *CO* 23:35.

<sup>63</sup> *Comm.* Gen. 2:7, *CO* 23:35-36.

<sup>64</sup> *Comm.* Gen. 3:22, *CO* 23:79.

<sup>65</sup> Randall Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Louisville: WJKP, 2005), 136-137, 161, rightly emphasizes communion with God as the highest goal for humanity, though he seems to incorrectly suggest that the supernatural gifts are the cause of communion.

Calvin's view of anthropology with the result that the divine connection recedes into the deep background."<sup>66</sup> When one neglects the connection between God and humans in Calvin's understanding of prelapsarian humanity, one of two results follow: either humans are elevated more highly than Calvin intended,<sup>67</sup> or, as happens more frequently, Calvin is believed to hold a dismal view of human nature and ability. Careful analysis of Calvin's teachings reveal that he held an optimistic yet humble view of prelapsarian humanity. In themselves, they were nothing more than dust of the earth, yet God created them by direct, gradual formation for his own glory. He endowed them with natural gifts that elevated them above the rest of creation and communicated to them adventitious gifts that reflected his own attributes. And it is the latter of these gifts that enabled the former to function properly so that humans, as real causal agents, might mount up to God and attain eternal bliss.

## 2.2. Fallen Humanity

Though our primal parents lived in a glorious state, capable of reaching perfection and eternal bliss, Calvin explains, "they did not long retain the dignity they had received."<sup>68</sup> The first humans fell from their original glory as a result of their own disobedience: "whatsoever is opprobrious in us must be imputed to our own fault, since our parents had nothing in themselves which was unbecoming until there were defiled with sin."<sup>69</sup> All our vices, therefore, are accidental. They result not from original nature, but from rebellion against God.<sup>70</sup>

Just "as it was the spiritual life of Adam to remain united and bound to his Maker, so estrangement from him was the death of his soul."<sup>71</sup> And death consists of "all those miseries in which Adam involved himself by his defection." Further, "for as soon as he revolted from God, the fountain of life, he was cast down from his former state, in order that he might perceive the life of man without God to be wretched and lost, and therefore differing nothing from death."<sup>72</sup> Yet, what is the nature of this revolt?

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<sup>66</sup> Partee, *Theology of Calvin*, 81. Vos, "The Christian Self-Image," also underscores "the dynamic and integral relationship between God and man in Calvin's theology" (81n.27; cf. 97).

<sup>67</sup> Partee, *Theology of Calvin*, 81.

<sup>68</sup> *Comm. Gen.* 3:6, *CO* 23:63.

<sup>69</sup> *Comm. Gen.* 2:25, *CO* 23:51.

<sup>70</sup> See *Comm. Gen.* 3:1, *CO* 23:52.

<sup>71</sup> *Inst.* 2.1.5 (1559), *OS* 3:232. Cf. *Comm. Gen.* 3:22, *CO* 23:79.

<sup>72</sup> *Comm. Gen.* 2:16, *CO* 23:45.

Explaining how the first humans fell from their original state, Calvin asserts that unbelief was the main cause.<sup>73</sup> “Eve erred in not regulating the measure of her knowledge by the will of God.”<sup>74</sup> Further, “After the heart had declined from faith, and from obedience to [God’s] word, she corrupted both herself and all her senses, and depravity was diffused through all parts of her soul as well as her body.”<sup>75</sup> Soon thereafter, Adam entangled himself in Eve’s transgression. Though Calvin affirms Augustine’s definition of sin as pride, he asserts that sin is more properly understood as unbelief or infidelity, and from such unbelief grows pride, selfish ambition, and transgressions against God’s law.<sup>76</sup>

When describing the essence of sin and the cause of the fall, Calvin describes unbelief as concomitant with alienation from God: “men revolted from God, *when*, having forsaken his word, they lent their ears to the falsehoods of Satan.”<sup>77</sup> Moreover, in considering more deeply “the origin and cause of sin,” Calvin contrasts rebellious disbelief with subjection to God—the latter which is connected to faith in God’s word.<sup>78</sup> Thus, it seems that unfaithfulness to God’s Word *is* apostasy.<sup>79</sup> Allegiance to God is trust in his commands and vice versa. Conversely, alienation from God is both the *beginning of* and *primary consequence of* the fall.<sup>80</sup>

Commenting on Calvin’s understanding of the consequences of the fall, Heiko Oberman argues, “Instead of debating whether the ‘substance’ of man may have been preserved while he only lost some ‘accidents,’ or pondering whether the ‘natural gifts’ were retained while the ‘supernatural gifts’ were lost, Calvin is intent to follow the biblical story and vocabulary by portraying created man as ‘in communion with God’ and fallen man as ‘alienated from God.’” Oberman calls this emphasis on the relational

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<sup>73</sup> See Lucien Joseph Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1974), 113.

<sup>74</sup> *Comm. Gen.* 3:5, *CO* 23:59. Cf. *Inst.* 2.1.4 (1559), *OS* 3:231: “disobedience was the beginning of the Fall.”

<sup>75</sup> *Comm. Gen.* 3:6, *CO* 23:59.

<sup>76</sup> *Inst.* 2.1.4 (1559), *OS* 3:231; *Inst.* 3.18.10 (1539), *OS* 4:281; *Comm. Gen.* 3:6, *CO* 23:60. Cf. Dancy, “The Transformed Individual,” 38-39; Parker, *Calvin*, 51.

Luther teaches something similar in his *Lectures on Genesis*: “Unbelief is the source of all sins” (*LW* 1:147, *WA* 42:111); “The source of all sin truly is unbelief and doubt and abandonment of the Word” (*LW* 1:149, *WA* 42:112).

<sup>77</sup> *Comm. Gen.* 3:6, *CO* 23:60.

<sup>78</sup> *Comm. Gen.* 3:6, *CO* 23:61.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *Inst.* 2.1.4 (1559), *OS* 2:232.

<sup>80</sup> See *Argumentum* in *Comm. Gen.*, p.65, *CO* 23:11-12: “Afterwards followed the fall of Adam, *whereby* he alienated himself from God.”

change a “paradigm shift” that “can best be captured by the formula ‘from ontology to psychology.’”<sup>81</sup> While Oberman correctly assesses that, for Calvin, the plight of fallen humanity is primarily relational, his suggestion that Calvin proposes a paradigm shift from “ontology to psychology” is overstated.<sup>82</sup> While Calvin indeed prioritizes the relational effect of the fall, he adjoins to it the “ontological”: as a result of humanity’s relational plight, they also suffer an ontological plight. Calvin does not focus on the relational effects *instead of* the ontological, but sees an inextricable connection between the two.

In revolting against their Creator, our primal parents were “despoiled of the excellent gifts of the Holy Spirit, of the light of reason, of justice, and of rectitude.”<sup>83</sup> And this seems to have happened immediately: “Afterwards followed the fall of Adam, whereby he alienated himself from God; *whence* it came to pass that he was deprived of all rectitude . . . devoid of all good, blinded in understanding, perverse in heart, vitiated in every part, and under sentence of eternal death.”<sup>84</sup> Further, “Withdrawing from the Kingdom of God, he is *at the same time* deprived of spiritual gifts, with which he had been furnished for the hope of eternal salvation.”<sup>85</sup> Just as communion with God was the source of the supernatural gifts, so alienation from him resulted in their absence.

Following Augustine, Calvin teaches that not only were the supernatural gifts withdrawn, but human nature was corrupted as well.<sup>86</sup> For Calvin, *all* of human nature, “the whole soul, and each of its faculties,” is corrupted.<sup>87</sup> Calvin also seems to teach that this corruption results from both the presence of sin and the absence of adventitious gifts. As the presence of supernatural gifts regulated the natural gifts and maintained their integrity, so their absence has detrimental consequences on the natural gifts. Helm

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<sup>81</sup> Heiko A. Oberman, “The Pursuit of Happiness: Calvin between Humanism and Reformation” in *Humanity and divinity in Renaissance and Reformation: Essays in Honor of Charles Trinkaus*, eds. John W. O’Malley, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 265.

<sup>82</sup> Moreover, Oberman’s use of “psychology” is confusing. While Oberman seems to use it to mean “relational,” it is unclear whether he also uses it to refer to the mental condition of postlapsarian humanity.

<sup>83</sup> *Comm. Gen.* 3:6, *CO* 23:62. Cf. Zwingli, *Short Christian Instruction* in *RC* 1:12, *CR* 89:631, who teaches that humans lost “the indwelling, ruling or leading of the spirit of God” in addition to “the grace and friendship of God” and “the perfect order of human nature.”

<sup>84</sup> *Argumentum* in *Comm. Gen.*, p.65, *CO* 23:11-12.

<sup>85</sup> *Inst.* 2.2.12 (1559), *OS* 3:254.

<sup>86</sup> *Inst.* 2.2.12 (1559), *OS* 3:254. Melancthon, *CTT* 79, *CR* 21:675, similarly teaches that in addition to having been “despoiled of the gifts of a perfect nature . . . [our] nature has been wounded.”

<sup>87</sup> *Comm. Gen.* 3:6, *CO* 23:62. Cf. *Inst.* 2.1.8 (1539), *OS* 3:236; *Inst.* 2.1.9 (1559), *OS* 3:238; *Inst.* 2.3.1 (1543), *OS* 3:272; *Inst.* 2.3.2 (1539), *OS* 3:273-274.

explains, “The ‘marks of excellence’ are defaced in the Fall, and in that sense lost, and this loss in turn affects the ‘canvas,’ the operation of man’s essence, human nature, the intellect, the will, and so on, without resulting in its complete loss, which would be impossible without utter dehumanization.”<sup>88</sup> Calvin admits that though God’s image was not annihilated in the fall, what remains is so corrupt that it is frightfully deformed.<sup>89</sup> We recall that while the *imago Dei* is connected more properly to the presence of supernatural gifts, it is also connected to human nature *qua talis*, though to a lesser degree. Thus Calvin is able to say God’s image is “effaced” but not altogether destroyed. Some vestige remains even in man’s sinful state.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, the original integrity that humans enjoyed was lost in their rebellion. Their natural faculties no longer are sound; nor do they function harmoniously by regulation of the adventitious gifts. This does not mean, however, that human nature is changed substantially. The mind and will remain. The corruption that humans suffer, therefore, is “accidental,” not “natural” or “essential.”<sup>91</sup>

Just as Calvin pinpoints reason first when discussing humanity’s original glory, so he does in describing its misery as a result of the fall: “The mind is smitten with blindness, and infected with innumerable errors.”<sup>92</sup> Until the mind is renewed by the Spirit, it is nothing but vanity. Yet the mind is not so weakened that it is incapable of *any* right judgment.<sup>93</sup> Since reason is a natural gift, “it could not be completely wiped out; but it was partly weakened and partly corrupted, so that its misshapen ruins appear.” While Calvin asserts that some light of reason still gleams in fallen humans, and thus distinguishes them from “brute beasts,” it is “choked with dense ignorance, so that it cannot come forth effectively.”<sup>94</sup> Calvin admits that humans can seek truth and often find it in lower matters, but that they do not arrive at what is ultimately true

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<sup>88</sup> Helm, *Calvin at the Centre*, 332.

<sup>89</sup> *Inst.* 1.15.4 (1559), *OS* 3:179. Calvin’s teaching on the remains of the *imago Dei* after the fall developed throughout his career (see Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 121-122).

<sup>90</sup> *Comm.* Jas. 3:9, *COR* II/XX:287-288.

<sup>91</sup> *Inst.* 2.1.11 (1539), *OS* 3:240; *BLW* 47-48, *COR* IV/III:115-116. Cf. Lane, “Anthropology,” 279; Helm, *Calvin at the Centre*, 314-15.

<sup>92</sup> *Comm.* Gen. 3:6, *CO* 23:62.

<sup>93</sup> See *Comm.* Eph. 4:17, *COR* II/XVI:239.

<sup>94</sup> *Inst.* 2.2.12 (1559), *OS* 3:255.

because the mind is so corrupt. Similar to Luther<sup>95</sup> and Melanchthon,<sup>96</sup> Calvin distinguishes between understanding “earthly things” and “heavenly things”:

I call “earthly things” those which do not pertain to God or his Kingdom, to true justice, or to the blessedness of the future life; but which have their significance and relationship with regard to the present life and are, in a sense, confined with its bounds. I call “heavenly things” the pure knowledge of God, the nature of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the Heavenly Kingdom. The first class includes government, household managements, all mechanical skills, and the liberal arts. In the second are the knowledge of God and of his will, and the rule by which we conform our lives to it.<sup>97</sup>

As social animals, humans can understand the principles of organization, foster and preserve society, and learn the arts and sciences. Even in our corruption, we are able to discern truth within the earthly realm because God has mercifully spared us from “the destruction of our whole nature.”<sup>98</sup> Yet when it comes to discerning “who the true God is or what sort of God he wishes to be toward us,”<sup>99</sup> we are “utterly blind and stupid”<sup>100</sup> because the mind lacks the adventitious gift of faith. Moreover, we cannot fully discern how to live according to God’s will or the “knowledge of the works of righteousness.” Calvin grants that the mind sometimes seems more acute in discerning justice from injustice than “higher things”<sup>101</sup>—namely, God’s true nature—because the natural law, which is engraved on the conscience, reflects God’s will. Nevertheless, our ability to discern justice is limited and imperfect.<sup>102</sup>

If the leader of the soul is blind, not knowing fully what is good, it follows that the will is unable to choose the good. Even if the mind could discern heavenly things,

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<sup>95</sup> Luther, *Bondage of the Will* in *LW* 33:264,270-271, *WA* 18:767-768,771, distinguishes moral/civil righteousness from faith-righteousness.

<sup>96</sup> Melanchthon, *Ap* in *BC* 233-235, *BSELK* 1:539, distinguishes civil/human righteousness from spiritual righteousness. The translation of the *Apology* that I am using from Kolb and Wengert uses as its basis the September 1531 edition (with variations of the text printed in italics), which for the most part corresponds to the text used in the 1580 German *Book of Concord*, though the official 1584 Latin *Book of Concord* uses the first edition of April/May 1531. See Kolb and Wengert, *BC* 107-109, on the development of Melanchthon’s *Apology* and its use.

<sup>97</sup> *Inst.* 2.2.13 (1539), *OS* 3:256. Cf. *BLW* 29, *COR* IV/III:96-97. See Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 72,79-80, on these distinctions.

<sup>98</sup> *Inst.* 2.2.17 (1559), *OS* 3:259.

<sup>99</sup> *Inst.* 2.2.18 (1539), *OS* 3:261.

<sup>100</sup> *Inst.* 2.2.19 (1539), *OS* 3:261.

<sup>101</sup> *Inst.* 2.2.22 (1539), *OS* 3:264.

<sup>102</sup> Melanchthon, *CTT* 57-58, *CR* 21:654, similarly teaches that unregenerate humans can “perform to some degree the external works of the Law”—namely, “external civil works.” Cf. *Romans* 89-90, *CR* 15:578.



the will would not be able to move in that direction because it is bound by sin. As Calvin explains in his 1538 Latin Catechism,

[man] is so estranged from God's righteousness that he conceives, desires, and strives after nothing that is not impious, distorted, evil, or impure. For a heart deeply steeped in sin's poison can bring forth nothing but the fruits of sin. Yet we are not to suppose for that reason that man has been driven by violent necessity to sin. He transgresses out of a will utterly prone to sin. But because on account of corruption of his feelings he utterly loathes all God's righteousness and is inflamed to every sort of wickedness, it is denied that he is endowed with the free capacity to choose good and evil which men call "free will."<sup>103</sup>

Although humans were oriented toward good at creation, they are now oriented toward evil, reviling God's commands and desiring what opposes his will. This does not mean, however, that the will is coerced or determined to sin by outside forces. Humans act not by "violent necessity" (i.e., coercion), but on their own accord.

In his 1543 *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, written in response to Dutch Roman Catholic theologian Albert Pighius—who wrote *Ten Books on Human Free Choice and Divine Grace* in opposition to Calvin's treatments of human free choice, predestination, and divine providence in his 1539 *Institutio*—Calvin also admits that the will is not coerced and rather is self-determined, choosing voluntarily what it wants.<sup>104</sup> In that sense, the will is "free." Yet Calvin rejects Pighius's teaching that humans *post lapsum* are free to choose between good and evil. Following Augustine, Calvin asserts that the unregenerate will is free to choose only evil since it is bound by sin.<sup>105</sup> Thus, humans sin of necessity, not because the will is coerced, but because it is so bound by sin that it desires nothing but sin and cannot choose what is good unless liberated by grace.<sup>106</sup> In this sense, Calvin denies free will, because the will is not able to choose between good and evil.<sup>107</sup> As he explained in the 1539 *Institutio*, the will is "bereft of freedom" and is "of necessity either drawn or led into evil."<sup>108</sup>

Calvin's teaching on free will, as Lane notes, is undergirded by his doctrine of original sin.<sup>109</sup> Calvin accuses Pighius of "Pelagian ungodliness,"<sup>110</sup> arguing that he

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<sup>103</sup> 1538 *Catechism* 9-10, *CO* 5:326.

<sup>104</sup> *BLW* 122, *COR* IV/III:194; Lane, "Introduction," in *COR* IV/III:46-47. Cf., *Inst.* 2.3.5 (1559), *OS* 3:278; *Comm. Rom.* 7:14, *COR* II/XIII:143-144.

<sup>105</sup> *BLW* 87-89, 105, 122, *COR* IV/III:157-159, 177, 194.

<sup>106</sup> *BLW* 87-89, *COR* IV/III:157-159; *Inst.* 2.3.5 (1539), *OS* 3:276-277. Cf. Lane, "Anthropology," 279-280.

<sup>107</sup> On Calvin and free will, see Lane, "Anthropology," 276-288; Raith, *After Merit*, 98-100.

<sup>108</sup> *Inst.* 2.3.5 (1539), *OS* 3:277.

<sup>109</sup> Lane, "Introduction," in *COR* IV/III:47.

“wants to have the will deprived of nothing by original sin except its rule over the members of the body; that it is more inclined to evil and to good [he believes] results from laziness, slackness, and bad habits, not from the fact that the will is evil and held prisoner by evil until it is set free.”<sup>111</sup> Whereas Pighius taught that the fall had simply weakened humans, Calvin taught that it corrupted all of human nature.<sup>112</sup> Calvin asks, “Since man has sinned not with some part of himself but with his whole being, why should it be surprising if he be said to have ruined himself totally?”<sup>113</sup> Calvin is ultimately concerned with the *scope* of sin’s impact on human nature, as Raith explains.<sup>114</sup> Since all of human nature is corrupted, the will cannot choose the good. Nor does it desire the good.<sup>115</sup> Our depraved will is “stuffed with corrupt feelings” and “hates nothing more than [God’s] righteousness.”<sup>116</sup>

This does not mean, however, that fallen humans are “utterly devoid of goodness.”<sup>117</sup> Van Vliet rightly explains that even after the fall, “the conscience, the light of nature, the sense of justice, the appreciation of beauty, and the desire for stability are all things which can be found throughout the human race. These qualities in humanity are indicative of original endowments which the Creator bestowed in the beginning.”<sup>118</sup> Even in his fallen condition, Calvin asserts, man “is, among other creatures, a certain pre-eminent specimen of Divine wisdom, justice, and goodness, so that he is deservedly called by the ancients *μικρίκοσμος*, ‘a world in miniature.’”<sup>119</sup> God has graciously retained a flickering of his image in humans and prevented them from descending into utter moral chaos. Similar to Luther, who taught that fallen humans are not totally incapacitated from pursuing some degree of civil righteousness though they

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<sup>110</sup> *BLW* 104, *COR* IV/III:175.

<sup>111</sup> *BLW* 105, *COR* IV/III:176. Even Catholics held reservations about Pighius’ teaching of original sin (see Lane, “Introduction,” in *COR* IV/III:13-15,47).

<sup>112</sup> *BLW* 107,175-176, *COR* IV/III:178-179,254.

<sup>113</sup> *BLW* 172, *COR* IV/III:250.

<sup>114</sup> Raith, *After Merit*, 99.

<sup>115</sup> See Jonathan S. Marko, “‘Free Choice’ in Calvin’s Concept of Regeneration and Moral Agency: How Free Are We?” *ATJ* 42 (2010): 43-46.

<sup>116</sup> *1538 Catechism* 9, *CO* 5:325.

<sup>117</sup> *Inst.* 2.3.4 (1539), *OS* 3:275.

<sup>118</sup> Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 122.

<sup>119</sup> *Comm.* Gen. 1:26, *CO* 23:25.

cannot prove themselves righteous before God,<sup>120</sup> Calvin teaches that fallen humans are able to pursue good in social, political, and familial matters. Calvin even states that some humans may be regarded as more virtuous than others, though their virtue is driven by selfish ambition and self-glory rather than a zeal for God.<sup>121</sup> Yet just as Calvin carefully qualifies that humans are not devoid of all goodness, he equally if not more carefully explains that their moral achievements in earthly matters are not achievements in heavenly matters.<sup>122</sup> While certain individuals may appear righteous *coram hominibus*, they are abominable *coram Deo* “since the thoughts of the mind, ever depraved and corrupted, lurk beneath.”<sup>123</sup> According to Calvin, then, fallen humans are not incapable of choosing *any* good, but incapable of choosing the *spiritual good*.<sup>124</sup> As Raith explains, they suffer from “total spiritual incapacity.”<sup>125</sup>

### 2.3. Redeemed Humanity

Turning to Calvin’s account of redemption, we discover that his anthropology is not as bleak as is often reported. In Christ, humans are made anew. It is in Calvin’s discussion of redemption that his understanding of human nature and ability becomes increasingly complex.

One reason Calvin teaches that the biblical accounts of creation, fall, and redemption must be held together is that he believes salvation includes, though cannot be reduced to, restoration.<sup>126</sup> Calvin describes this restoration in two distinct ways: situational and experiential. Situationally, believers are restored to a righteous status *coram Deo*. The Mediator’s task was to “restore us to God’s grace as to make of the

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<sup>120</sup> See *Bondage of the Will* in LW 33:264,270-271, WA 18:767-768,771; Robert Kolb and Carl R. Trueman, *Between Wittenberg and Geneva: Lutheran and Reformed Theology in Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 36,93.

<sup>121</sup> *Inst.* 2.3.4 (1539,1539), *OS* 3:275-276.

<sup>122</sup> See Herman Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1928), 21-22.

<sup>123</sup> *Inst.* 1536, 16, *OS* 1:38. Cf. Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 72.

<sup>124</sup> Raith, *After Merit*, 92-98. I will use Raith’s terminology “spiritual good” regarding Calvin’s teaching on human ability throughout this study—although Raith actually speaks of “spiritual goods.”

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-94.

<sup>126</sup> On salvation including restoration, see Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New*, 152; Raith, *After Merit*, 84,120; Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 77. Cf. Armstrong, “*Duplex cognitio*,” 148; Randall Zachman, “Grateful Humility in the Children of God: Knowledge of Ourselves in Calvin’s Theology,” in *Calvin, the Man and the Legacy*, eds. Murray Rae, et al. (Hindmarsh: AFT Theology, 2014), 45-46; Richard, *Spirituality of John Calvin*, 113.

children of men, children of God; of heirs of Gehenna, heirs of the Heavenly Kingdom.”<sup>127</sup> Experientially, believers are restored to life and an upright condition. Through Christ, man is “restored to the life he had forfeited.”<sup>128</sup> Further, God the Son became man to restore our nature to its “former condition.”<sup>129</sup>

However, Calvin does not envisage this restoration as a return to our prelapsarian state. He asserts that the grace received in Christ is richer in measure than what humans received at creation.<sup>130</sup> Further, while Calvin tends to emphasize the *gifts* of the Spirit that are endowed to and then withdrawn from humanity in his account of creation and the fall,<sup>131</sup> he stresses the *indwelling* of the Spirit in his account of redemption.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, while prelapsarian humanity had both the potential to remain upright, and thus attain eternal life, and the potential to sin—which they eventually did—those in Christ will one day possess eternal life and enter a state in which it will they cannot sin.<sup>133</sup> Thus, the eternal bliss that was once *possible* for humanity is now *guaranteed* for the redeemed. Salvation, then, is an expansion of sorts and not simply a restoration.<sup>134</sup> This is evinced in that believers are conformed to the image of Christ, to whom they are forever united.<sup>135</sup> Further, when Calvin speaks of believers’ experiential restoration, it seems he means that they are given once again the adventitious gifts that regulate their natural faculties and thus enable them to desire, pursue, and perform the

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<sup>127</sup> *Inst.* 2.12.2 (mainly 1536), *OS* 3:438. Cf. *Inst.* 2.16.2 (1543), *OS* 3:483; and *Inst.* 3.11.21 (1539), *OS* 4:205, wherein Calvin states that the death of Christ restores us to divine favor. In *Inst.* 2.17.3 (1559), *OS* 3:511, Calvin states that by Christ’s obedience we are received (*recipi*) into God’s favor. *Recipio* can mean “to take back” or “recover” and not simply “to accept.” Granted, in *Institution de la religion chrestienne* (Geneva: Jean Crispin, 1560), Calvin uses *recepvoir*, which means “to receive.” Still, in the context of both the 1559 and 1560 editions, Calvin’s point is that God, in receiving us into his favor, restores our relationship to him.

<sup>128</sup> *Argumentum* in *Comm. Gen.*, p.64, *CO* 23:11-12.

<sup>129</sup> *Inst.* 2.12.7 (1559), *OS* 3:445. Cf. *Comm. Gen.* 3:22, *CO* 23:79, wherein Calvin speaks of man’s excommunication from the garden as sign that God would eventually, through expiation, “restore him to the life he had lost.” Melancthon, *CTT* 59, *CR* 21:655, also speaks of the restoration/renewal of human nature in Christ.

<sup>130</sup> *Inst.* 1.15.4 (1559), *OS* 3:179; *Antidote* in *Tracts* 3:112, *CO* 7:445; *BLW* 177, *COR* IV/III:256. Cf. O’Donovan, “Human Dignity and Human Justice,” 132. Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 241, obscures this by stating that justification “implies a return to a state prior to the enslavement of sin.”

<sup>131</sup> See *Comm. Gen.* 3.6, *CO* 23:62.

<sup>132</sup> See *Inst.* 3.1.2 (1559/1536), *OS* 4:2-3.

<sup>133</sup> See *BLW* 240-241, *COR* IV/III:325; Lane, “Anthropology,” 288.

<sup>134</sup> Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 77, draws a similar conclusion, though more specifically in reference to restoration of God’s image in believers.

<sup>135</sup> *Comm. Rom.* 8:29, *COR* II/XIII:177.

spiritual good. Christ restores in believers the gifts of “faith, love of God, charity toward neighbor, zeal for holiness and for righteousness.”<sup>136</sup> Moreover, “It is the part of the same God to restore that which he had given at the beginning, but which had been taken away from us for a time.”<sup>137</sup> And the restoration of the supernatural gifts renews the natural ones. Yet, as will be discussed below, the renewal that believers experience occurs gradually, not immediately, over the course of the Christian life and will be completed in the eschaton.

Whereas Calvin discusses in *Institutio* book 2 how Christ has *accomplished* our restoration, he transitions in book 3 to the specifics of our restoration and how they are *received*. Throughout book 3, it becomes clear that the situational and experiential restoration that believers experience as a result of Christ’s work is received in the *duplex gratia* of justification and sanctification. In justification, believers are restored to a right standing before God, though *in se* they are unrighteous. In sanctification, they are progressively restored to life and holiness, thus actually made righteous. Further, Calvin’s descriptions of the *duplex gratia* are strikingly similar to his descriptions of the “synecdoche” of God’s image.<sup>138</sup> As Helm rightly notes, Calvin often refers to justification as “righteousness” and to sanctification as “holiness”—though he also refers to the latter with other terms and phrases such as “blamelessness,” “integrity,” “purity of life,” “cleanness,” “virtues,” and “reformation into newness of life.”<sup>139</sup> This does not mean, however, that he never uses *righteousness* language in reference to the sanctified life. He occasionally uses *sanctitas* and *iustitia* interchangeably in reference to Christian living.<sup>140</sup> In the *duplex gratia*, therefore, the “chief part” of God’s image (righteousness and holiness) is restored in believers.

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<sup>136</sup> *Inst.* 2.2.12 (1559), *OS* 3:255.

<sup>137</sup> *Inst.* 2.2.25 (1559), 268.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Nico Vorster, “‘United but not Confused’: Calvin’s Anthropology as Hermeneutical Key to Understanding His Societal Doctrine,” *JCS* 58.1 (Winter 2016): 132, who states that the supernatural gifts recovered in Christ consist of justification and regeneration.

<sup>139</sup> Helm, *Calvin at the Centre*, 211-212, who points to *Inst.* 3.11.1-12 (1539, 1543, 1550, 1559), *OS* 4:181-197; 3.16.1 (1536, 1539), *OS* 4:248-249. Cf. “Calvin’s Reply to Sadoletto,” 68, *OS* 1:470.

<sup>140</sup> E.g., *Comm. Rom.* 6:19, *COR II/XIII*:131: “By *righteousness* I understand the law and the rule of righteous living, the purpose of which is sanctification, so that believers may consecrate themselves in purity to the service of God”; *Inst.* 3.6.2 (1539), *OS* 4:147, where reminding his readers that believers are called to pursue righteousness, Calvin refers to Leviticus 19:1 and 1 Peter 1:16—“be holy, for I am holy”; *Inst.* 3.11.12 (1559), *OS* 4:196, wherein Calvin states that God renews us unto “holiness and righteousness of life.”

Just as Calvin prioritizes *communio* in his account of creation, so he does in his applied soteriology.<sup>141</sup> He asserts that fallen humans must seek God, “*in whom* each of us may recover those good things which we have utterly and completely lost.”<sup>142</sup> The restoration of the *imago Dei* is not accomplished apart from personal connection to the Savior.<sup>143</sup> Nor does such restoration result from conferral of abstract gifts; for the adventitious gifts endowed to original humanity were spiritual qualities and capabilities that reflected God’s own attributes and excellencies.<sup>144</sup> And just as communication with God was the source of these gifts for prelapsarian humans, so a new communication is the source for believers.

When discussing *how* the gifts that Christ won back for humanity come to believers, Calvin employs the concept of *unio cum Christo*. Calvin, Wilhelm Niesel explained, “teaches the communion of the Head with the members, the indwelling of Christ in our hearts, the hidden union and the sacred marriage between Him and ourselves, as the basis of our appropriation of the salvation which He has won for us.”<sup>145</sup> Or as Stadtland put it, “Wenn Calvin freilich vom Wirksamwerden dieser Functionen [Rechtfertigung und Heiligung] – als Heilswirklichkeit *pro nobis* – spricht, dann ist von der *unio cum Christo* die Rede.”<sup>146</sup> In the opening of *Institutio* book 3, Calvin exclaims that “as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. . . . [A]ll that he possesses is nothing to us *until we grow into one body with him*.”<sup>147</sup> Later he writes, “Although we may distinguish [justification and sanctification], Christ contains both of them inseparably *in himself*. Do you wish, then, to attain righteousness in Christ? *You must first possess Christ*.”<sup>148</sup> According to Calvin, the benefits of salvation—chiefly justification and sanctification—are given to believers only in personal connection to the Savior. Moreover, such benefits do not *cause*

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<sup>141</sup> Cf. Joe Mock, “Union with Christ and the Lord’s Supper in Calvin,” *RTR* 75.2 (August 2016): 110.

<sup>142</sup> *Inst.* 2.1.1 (1559/1539), *OS* 3:229.

<sup>143</sup> See Johnson, “New or Nuanced Perspective,” 545.

<sup>144</sup> Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 116.

<sup>145</sup> Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 125.

<sup>146</sup> Stadtland, *Rechtfertigung*, 118: “However, when Calvin speaks of the starting point of these features [justification and sanctification] – as the reality of salvation *pro nobis* – then union with Christ becomes the issue.” Cf. Wendel, *Calvin*, 234.

<sup>147</sup> *Inst.* 3.1.1 (1559/1536), *OS* 4:1.

<sup>148</sup> *Inst.* 3.16.1 (1539), *OS* 4:249.

union.<sup>149</sup> Calvin prioritizes union with Christ, who is the source of salvation in all its parts. Just as *communio cum Deo* was the source of life and the adventitious gifts at creation, so *unio cum Christo* is the source of new life and the gifts of redemption. Further, faith is the means for apprehending Christ and his benefits. “It is true that we obtain this [union] by faith.”<sup>150</sup> Further, “Faith is the principal work of the Holy Spirit,”<sup>151</sup> who “is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself.”<sup>152</sup> Thus, Calvin’s applied soteriology is not solely Christocentric. While salvation is available only in Christ, it is apprehended only by the power of the Spirit.<sup>153</sup> Just as unbelief led to alienation from God, resulting in the loss of supernatural gifts and the corruption of nature, so Spirit-created faith unites believers to Christ, who restores them to a righteous standing before God and holiness of life.

Calvin admits that humans can theoretically prove themselves righteous *coram Deo* and thus be justified by works. He writes, “He is said to be justified in God’s sight who is both reckoned righteous in God’s judgment and has been accepted on account of

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<sup>149</sup> Michael Horton, *Justification*, 2 vols., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), displays confusion over whether union is the source of justification and sanctification, or whether justification brings about union and moral renewal. He states that “for the magisterial Reformers, union with Christ is . . . the source of sanctification” (207) and that for Calvin, “all else that we receive—redemption, justification, sanctification, glorification—is the fruit of belonging to Christ” (213; cf. 216), yet also that “forensic justification through faith alone is the fountain of union with Christ in all of its renewal” (215; cf. 219).

<sup>150</sup> *Inst.* 3.1.1 (1559/1536), *OS* 4:1.

<sup>151</sup> *Inst.* 3.1.4 (1559), *OS* 4:5.

<sup>152</sup> *Inst.* 3.1.1 (1559/1536), *OS* 4:2.

<sup>153</sup> While many interpreters who favor the *unio* paradigm acknowledge Calvin’s emphasis on the Spirit’s role in creating faith within believers and uniting them to Christ, some tend to paint Calvin’s applied soteriology in largely Christocentric terms. This is not totally unwarranted, given that Calvin emphasizes *Christ* as the one in whom our salvation rests, and that he describes the *duplex gratia* with a Christological analogy informed by Chalcedonian Christology. Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 47,190, is critical of heavily Christocentric approaches and singles out Venema, *Accepted and Renewed*, 86, who writes, “In his interpretation of the Spirit’s person and work, Calvin’s whole orientation is Christological.” Wright argues that *Institutio* book 3 focuses more on the Spirit working within us than on *unio* (190). While both Venema’s and Wright’s statements have warrant, Calvin employs a trinitarian approach to applied soteriology: the Father extends mercy to sinners on account of Christ’s merits; Christ unites believers to himself by the Spirit; the Spirit creates faith within believers and unites them to Christ; the Father creates good works in believers by the Spirit; and the Father pardons and accepts these works (some of these features will be discussed later). Mary Patton Baker, “Calvin’s *praxis* of the Lord’s Supper and the *duplex gratia* of salvation,” in *Since We Are Justified by Faith*, 87-88,90-91, also underscores the trinitarian scope of Calvin’s soteriology. Both Christ and the Spirit are integral to Calvin’s soteriology. Moreover, just as Calvin’s notion of the *duplex gratia* utilizes a robust pneumatology, so does his positive notion of works-righteousness, which will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters.

his righteousness.”<sup>154</sup> Further, “Perfect obedience to the law is righteousness.” Yet Calvin denies that humans can attain such righteousness, “not because [the law] is defective and mutilated of itself, but because, due to the weakness of our flesh, [perfect obedience] is nowhere visible.”<sup>155</sup> Put differently, “the law is indeed the way to salvation,” because it teaches us what righteousness is, but “our depravity and corruption prevent it from being of any advantage to us in this respect.”<sup>156</sup> Therefore, to be restored to a righteous status *coram Deo*, sinners must look outside themselves for “another righteousness.”<sup>157</sup>

Calvin is clear that sinners are justified only on account of Christ’s righteousness, because only in him do we find “the exact righteousness of the law.”<sup>158</sup> Christ subjected himself to the law so he could “acquire righteousness for us, undertaking to pay what we could not pay.” And “the righteousness found in Christ alone is reckoned as ours.”<sup>159</sup> Justification, therefore, is strictly forensic.<sup>160</sup> It is not a renovative process, but a declarative act whereby believers are accounted righteous, not because they are *in se* but because they have put on the righteous one.<sup>161</sup> Calvin calls this verdict “the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as righteous men,”<sup>162</sup> which consists in non-imputation of sins and imputation of Christ’s

<sup>154</sup> *Inst.* 3.11.2 (1539), *OS* 4:182.

<sup>155</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.7 (1539), *OS* 4:260. Cf. *Comm.* Rom. 2:13, *COR* II/XIII:45-46.

<sup>156</sup> *Comm.* Rom. 3:20, *COR* II/XIII:67.

<sup>157</sup> *Comm.* Rom. 2:13, *COR* II/XIII:45. Cf. *Inst.* 3.11.23 (1539), *OS* 4:206. This is essentially Calvin’s way of affirming Luther’s notion of alien righteousness (see *Two Kinds of Righteousness* in *LW* 31:297-299, *WA* 2:145-146).

<sup>158</sup> *Comm.* Rom. 3:31, *COR* II/XIII:78. Cf. *Inst.* 3.11.23 (mainly 1539), *OS* 4:206-207.

<sup>159</sup> *Inst.* 2.17.5 (1559), *OS* 3:513.

<sup>160</sup> See *Inst.* 3.11.11 (1559), *OS* 4:193.

<sup>161</sup> *Inst.* 3.11.2 (mainly 1539, 1543), *OS* 4:182-183; *Inst.* 3.11.23 (mainly 1539), *OS* 4:206-207; cf. Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 132. Calvin is distinct from Bucer, for example, who understood justification as both declarative and effective/transformational (see *CP* 160-164, *B.Rom.* 11-13; Brian Lugioyo, *Martin Bucer’s Doctrine of Justification: Reformation Theology and Early Modern Irenicism* [Oxford: OUP, 2010], 50-53). Whereas Bucer followed Augustine more closely, and even invoked him positively in referring to justification as God’s act of making sinners righteous (see *CP* 163, *B.Rom.* 12), Calvin rejected Augustine’s understanding that God’s declarative act also made the sinner righteous experientially (see *Inst.* 3.11.15 [1539], *OS* 4:200; *Comm.* Rom. 3:21, *COR* II/XIII:68). Instead, Calvin ascribed God’s effective/transformational act to a distinct grace—sanctification. See McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 253.

<sup>162</sup> *Inst.* 3.11.2 (1543), *OS* 4:183. Cf. *Inst.* 3.11.4 (1543), *OS* 4:184; *Serm.* Gen. 15:6 (2:340), *SC* XI/2:760. Melancthon similarly describes justification as divine acceptance. See *Romans*, 25-26, 70, 98, 100, *CR* 15:511, 558, 586, 588; Timothy Wengert, *Law and Gospel: Philip Melancthon’s Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over Poenitentia* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 179. So does Bucer (e.g., *CP* 166-167, *B.Rom.* 13-14).



righteousness.<sup>163</sup> Although believers are unrighteous in themselves, God reckons them righteous by accounting Christ's righteousness to them.

Calvin's concept of imputation is deeply participatory. J. Todd Billings explains, "In Calvin, the 'forensic' imputation of Christ's righteousness and the mystical union with Christ are held in the closest possible relationship—one is unthinkable without the other."<sup>164</sup> Believers receive Christ's righteousness because they are united to him. And while believers are passive in *God's declaration* of justification—they are justified apart from their works—they are not passive in *the reception* of Christ's righteousness.<sup>165</sup> Calvin agrees with his opponents that God "does not act with man as with a block" and "does not draw him without his being willing."<sup>166</sup> Yet he denies that man's ability to submit to God resides within himself.<sup>167</sup> As noted earlier, Calvin rejects the idea that unregenerate humans can either accept or reject God's grace. Conversely, he insists that God works efficaciously in us by his Spirit and thus "directs, bends, and governs our heart and reigns in it as in his own possession."<sup>168</sup> Also, the sinner must acknowledge her sin, recognize her inability to meet God's standard of righteousness, and cast away "all self-confidence."<sup>169</sup> This is the first movement, as it were, of faith. The conjoining movement is turning to Christ as her only righteousness. Both can happen only when God's grace comes to the believer:

we must make this our starting point, viz., that the mind of man is blind until it is illuminated by the Spirit of God—that the will is enslaved to evil, and wholly carried and hurried to evil, until corrected by the same Spirit, and that the voluntary reception of grace cannot have any other origin than this—that God forming a heart of flesh out of our stony heart, brings us who were formerly turned away back to himself.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> *Inst.* 3.11.2 (1543), *OS* 4:183; 3.11.4 (1543,1550,1559), *OS* 4:184-185. On this twofold nature of justification, see Parker, *Calvin*, 98-99; Wright, *Calvin's Salvation*, 146,165-168. Calvin is not the only reformer to teach that justification includes forgiveness and imputation. E.g., Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1519) in *LW* 27:221, *WA* 2:490; Melancthon, *Romans* 11,16,98-100,119,124, *CR* 15:495,501,586-588,609,613; and Bucer, *CP* 162-163,166-167, *B.Rom.* 12,13-14.

<sup>164</sup> J. Todd Billings, "United to God through Christ: Assessing Calvin on the Question of Deification," *HTR* 98.3 (2005): 329.

<sup>165</sup> Granted, Calvin explicitly states in *Inst.* 3.13.5 (1559), *OS* 4:220, that, regarding justification, "faith is something merely passive." In context, he means that one cannot earn God's favor, not that faith involves no activity of the believer. Cf. Billings, *Calvin*, 114.

<sup>166</sup> *True Method in Tracts* 3:243, *CO* 7:594.

<sup>167</sup> *True Method in Tracts* 3:243-244, *CO* 7:594.

<sup>168</sup> *Inst.* 2.3.10 (1539), *OS* 3:285.

<sup>169</sup> "Calvin's Reply to Sadoletto," 66, *OS* 1:469.

<sup>170</sup> *True Method in Tracts* 3:244, *CO* 7:594.

Faith itself, however, does not hold justifying power. Calvin employs Aristotelian causality to explain the mechanics of justification: “When, therefore, we are justified, the efficient cause is the mercy of God, Christ is the substance of our justification, and the Word, with faith, the instrument. Faith is therefore said to justify, because it is the instrument by which we receive Christ, in whom righteousness is communicated to us.”<sup>171</sup> Calvin thus avoids turning faith into a “work.” He even compares faith to “a kind of vessel; for unless we come empty and with the mouth of our soul open to seek Christ’s grace, we are not capable of receiving Christ.”<sup>172</sup>

Justification is in Christ alone, by faith alone. As T.H.L. Parker remarked, “*God* accepts us; *God* receives us into grace; *God* regards us as righteous. Justification is initiated and carried through by God and God alone. In this act there is no place for man as God’s fellow worker.”<sup>173</sup> Again, Calvin adamantly rejects the idea that God and humans contribute their respective parts in salvation, or that humans use grace as best they can, if they so choose, and God makes up for what is lacking.<sup>174</sup> Thus, in expounding justification, Calvin distinguishes sharply between works-righteousness and faith-righteousness, insisting that God acts without human contribution. Sinners are restored to God’s favor only by Christ’s merits.

While Calvin insists that we are not justified *by* works, he emphasizes just as forcefully that we are not justified *without* works.<sup>175</sup> Although justification is attained by faith and not works, faith and works are inseparable.<sup>176</sup> When believers are united to Christ, they receive both justification, in which they are reconciled to God, *and* regeneration (or sanctification), in which they are restored to purity of life.<sup>177</sup> Both

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<sup>171</sup> *Comm.* Rom. 3:22, *COR II/XIII*:70-71. Cf. 3:24; *Inst.* 3.14.17 (1539,1643), *OS* 4:235-236; *Int.* 3.14.21 (1539), *OS* 4:238.

<sup>172</sup> *Inst.* 3.11.7 (1559), *OS* 4:188. Cf. Melancthon, *Ap* in *BC* 129, *BSELK* 1:441: “faith does not justify or save because it is a worthy work in and of itself, but only because it receives the promised mercy.”

<sup>173</sup> Parker, *Calvin*, 98.

<sup>174</sup> Raith, *After Merit*, 69. Cf. *Inst.* 3.14.11 (1543), *OS* 4:230; *Antidote* in *Tracts* 3:108, *CO* 7:442.

<sup>175</sup> See Lane, “The Role of Scripture,” 372-373. Melancthon, *CTT* 196, *CR* 21:786, teaches the same idea. Cf. Bucer *CP* 165-166, *B.Rom.* 13.

<sup>176</sup> Calvin uses imagery of the sun’s light and heat to illustrate the inseparability of faith and works (see *Inst.* 3.11.6 [1559], *OS* 4:187). Similarly, Zwingli, *Fidei Expositio* in *RC* 1:203, Niemeyer 59; and Bucer, *CP* 166, *B.Rom.* 13, state that faith and works are inseparable like fire and heat.

<sup>177</sup> Calvin frequently uses *regeneration* and *sanctification* interchangeably. While later Reformed thinkers used *regeneration* in reference to the initial transformation experienced at conversion, Calvin uses it, along with *sanctification* and *repentance*, in reference to the “second

graces are given simultaneously and inseparably in Christ, because Christ contains both in himself and “he cannot be divided into pieces.”<sup>178</sup>

While Calvin stresses the simultaneity and inseparability of justification and sanctification, he does not indicate that the “relative ‘ordo’ or priority of justification and sanctification is indifferent theologically,” to use Gaffin’s earlier words.<sup>179</sup> Debate abounds regarding Calvin’s reason for discussing sanctification before justification in *Institutio* book 3. While he may be addressing the objections of his Catholic opponents by demonstrating that good works are not disconnected from faith, that one cannot receive justification without sanctification,<sup>180</sup> his content suggests another, though related, reason. He states that “when [sanctification] is rightly understood it will better appear how man is justified by faith alone, and simple pardon.”<sup>181</sup> As his argument unfolds throughout book 3, it becomes clear that while believers are able to do good works by the Spirit’s power, they can never look to their works as the ultimate basis for divine acceptance.<sup>182</sup> Therefore, believers must always look to free pardon and

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grace” that believers receive when united to Christ. Moreover, *regeneration/sanctification/repentance* are progressive throughout the Christian life. See Mary Patton Baker, *Participation in Christ and Eucharistic Formation: John Calvin and the Theodrama of the Lord’s Supper* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015), 11n.4, 13-14n.18; Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 4n.7; Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 209-210. I will use *sanctification* and *regeneration* interchangeably in reference to progressive renewal, though I will sometimes use the latter also in reference to the initial vivifying experience believers have when united to Christ, as Calvin himself does.

<sup>178</sup> *Inst.* 3.16.1 (mainly 1539), *OS* 4:249. Cf. *Inst.* 3.2.8 (1536, 1539), *OS* 4:18; *Comm. Rom.*, p.8, *COR II/XIII*:9. When explaining the *duplex gratia*, Calvin follows the Chalcedonian formula of distinction without separation: just as Christ’s two natures cannot be separated or confused, neither can justification and sanctification since they both flow from and are held together in Christ. On the simultaneity and inseparability of justification and sanctification in Calvin’s soteriology, the importance of 1 Corinthians 1:30 in Calvin’s argument, and Calvin’s use of the image of tearing Christ into pieces, see Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 219-241.

Melanchthon also speaks of a *simul*: the Holy Spirit, who gives us new desires and powers to live in accordance with God’s law, is given when faith apprehends God’s mercy. See *CTT*, 149, 174, *CR* 21:742, 765; *Romans* 25-26, 71, 137, *CR* 15:511, 559, 627.

<sup>179</sup> As noted in chapter 1, Gaffin has nuanced his interpretation over time regarding the logical priority of justification.

<sup>180</sup> Calvin states in *Inst.* 3.11.1 (1539), *OS* 4:182, that he discussed regeneration first to show that justifying faith is not devoid of good works. Cf. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 212; Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 130; Parker, *Calvin*, 95.

<sup>181</sup> *Inst.* 3.3.1 (1559), *OS* 4:55.

<sup>182</sup> See Lane, “Twofold Righteousness: A Key to the Doctrine of Justification? Reflections on Article 5 of the Regensburg Colloquy (1541),” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates?*, 215; idem., *Justification by Faith*, 158-167. While Bucer includes impartation of righteousness in his doctrine of justification, he stresses that imparted righteousness never merits divine acceptance (see Wright’s remarks in *CP* 159 and Bucer’s teaching in *CP* 164-165, *B.Rom.* 13), Calvin includes only imputation. Still, both Calvin and

imputation. This is why Calvin famously terms justification “the main hinge on which religion turns” and even calls it a “foundation on which to establish your salvation . . . [and] to build piety for God.”<sup>183</sup> Moreover, in his Romans commentary, he explains that “the main or cardinal point of the first part of this epistle” is that “we are justified by faith through the mercy of God alone.”<sup>184</sup> This does not suggest, however, that Paul subordinates sanctification to justification. Calvin states that justification *sola fide* is the main point of *the first half* of Romans.<sup>185</sup> Once he reaches chapter 6, he explains that regeneration, or the worship of God “in purity of life,” is the *finem* for which we are justified.<sup>186</sup> Similarly, in his reply to Sadoletto, he claims that the end of “gratuitous justification” is “that we may lead pure and unpolluted lives before God.”<sup>187</sup> And commenting on 2 Peter 1:4, he asserts that the *Evangelii finis* is “to make us sooner or later like God; indeed, it is, so to speak, a kind of deification.”<sup>188</sup> God does not consider us righteous and then leave us unaffected experientially.<sup>189</sup> The ultimate goal of the gospel is to *make* us righteous. Therefore, while one can say that justification is logically prior to sanctification, it is more accurate to describe justification as “ordered to sanctification,”<sup>190</sup> which is God’s ultimate goal for the believer.

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Bucer agreed that good works or imparted righteousness could never procure God’s favor and that believers must trust in God’s mercy alone.

<sup>183</sup> *Inst.* 3.11.1 (1539), *OS* 4:182. Cf. “Calvin’s Reply to Sadoletto,” 69, *OS* 1:471: “on this gratuitous justification the salvation of man perpetually depends.”

<sup>184</sup> *Comm. Rom.* 1:17, *COR II/XIII*:29.

<sup>185</sup> Albeit, Calvin states in his *Argumentum in Comm. Rom.*, p.5, *COR II/XIII*:7, that justification *sola fide* is “the main subject of the whole Epistle,” but also that Paul discusses it only through chapter 5. Calvin possibly displays inconsistency on this issue here. Although Calvin at one point states that justification is the main subject of Romans, it does not mean that he sees it as *the* substance of the Christian life. It is only one component of salvation, as necessary as it is.

<sup>186</sup> *Comm. Rom.* 6:2, *COR II/VIII*:118. Cf. *Inst.* 3.6.2 (1539), *OS* 4:147. Raith, *After Merit*, 109, also recognizes that sanctification is the goal of justification.

<sup>187</sup> “Calvin’s Reply to Sadoletto,” 69, *OS* 1:471. Recalling Van Vliet’s observation that the supernatural gifts were not ends in themselves but were given for an “unto what” (*Children of God*, 74), it seems the same is true for the gifts of justification and regeneration.

<sup>188</sup> *Comm. 2 Pet.* 1:4, *COR II/XX*:328. Cf. *Inst.* 1:15.4 (1559), *OS* 3:179; *Inst.* 3.3.9 (1539), *OS* 4:63; *Comm. Col.* 3:10, *COR II/XVI*:448-449.

<sup>189</sup> Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 6, states that justification alone is insufficient to describe all of salvation and that a complete statement requires acknowledging the *duplex gratia*.

<sup>190</sup> Raith, *After Merit*, 36 (cf. 108). Cf. Billings, *Calvin*, 107: “the first grace of free pardon provides the indispensable context for the second”; and Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 208-212, who helpfully discusses the ordering of Calvin’s treatment of justification and sanctification in *Institutio* book 3 and concludes that while justification/reconciliation and regeneration/sanctification are grounded in faith-union, Calvin seems to ascribe some priority—at least logically and perhaps even temporally—to justification/reconciliation. Wright, *Calvin’s*

Calvin's account of sanctification demonstrates that by virtue of the indwelling Spirit, believers undergo a radical transformation. As the very term *regeneratio* implies, God renews our nature.<sup>191</sup> The Spirit gives us new life and makes us new creatures in Christ. For Calvin, however, the renewal believers experience in this life is primarily spiritual, pertaining to the soul and its faculties. The redemption of our bodies will happen "after we have finished our earthly pilgrimage."<sup>192</sup>

Just as unbelief was death to Adam, so illumination is life to the soul: "When [God] illumines us with knowledge of himself, he is said to revive us from death, to make us a new creature."<sup>193</sup> Illumined unto faith, we are once again able to discern heavenly things, for "faith is much higher than human understanding."<sup>194</sup> "We are lifted up in mind and heart above our understanding. For the soul, illumined by him, takes on a new keenness, as it were, to contemplate the heavenly mysteries, whose splendor had previously blinded it."<sup>195</sup> Illumination, however, is not simply intellectual ascent. The mind, as the leader of the soul, must be renewed in order to discern God's will. Once enlightened by God's Spirit, humans are again able to attain true knowledge of God and his law—knowledge that leads to obedience and worship. Thus, faith enables the mind to function as God originally intended.

For Calvin, the ability to understand heavenly matters ultimately does not profit unless the will is also liberated and renewed. Whereas *post lapsum* the will was opposed to God's law and the affections were disposed toward unrighteousness, at conversion God "begins his good work in us, therefore, by arousing love and desire and zeal for righteousness in our hearts; or, to speak more correctly, by bending, forming, and directing, our hearts to righteousness."<sup>196</sup> Positively, the "will is formed so that it necessarily follows the leading of the Holy Spirit, and not that it is sufficiently

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*Salvation*, 86, states that sanctification cannot be considered in itself and makes sense only in light of justification. Relying on Hegel, however, Wright mistakenly concludes, "Cause and Effect best captures the most significant conceptual relation between justification and sanctification" (235; cf. 240-241, 246). Wendel, *Calvin*, 256, states amiss, "One must avoid making one the final aim of the other. Sanctification is not the purpose of justification." Melancthon, *CTT* 171, *CR* 21:762, seems to teach something similar to Calvin: "we are born again in reconciliation so that the new obedience might be begun in us."

<sup>191</sup> See Lane, "Anthropology," 285-286; Raith, *After Merit*, 119-125.

<sup>192</sup> *Comm. Rom.* 8:23, *COR II/XIII*:171.

<sup>193</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.5 (1539), *OS* 4:223. Cf. *Inst.* 3.2.35 (1559), *OS* 4:46.

<sup>194</sup> *Inst.* 3.2.33 (1539), *OS* 4:44.

<sup>195</sup> *Inst.* 3.2.34 (1539), *OS* 4:45.

<sup>196</sup> *Inst.* 2.3.6 (1539), *OS* 3:279.

encouraged to be able to do so if it wills.”<sup>197</sup> Negatively, it is restrained so that “it may not according to its natural inclination be dragged to and fro by wandering lusts. That the will may be disposed to holiness and righteousness, [God’s Spirit] bends, shapes, forms, and directs it to the rule of his righteousness.”<sup>198</sup> God regenerates believers so they may pursue holiness and righteousness. Yet they cannot do so unless the Spirit regulates and directs their wills, because *in se* they are corrupt and disposed toward evil.<sup>199</sup>

It should not be overlooked that, for Calvin, the Spirit enables believers not only to *desire* the spiritual good, but also to *perform* it: “For Paul bears witness that God does not bring about in us [merely] that we are able to will what is good, but also that we should will it right up to the completion of the act. How big a difference there is between performance and will!”<sup>200</sup> And such performance may indeed be called the believer’s. Following Augustine, Calvin asserts that when God acts upon believers, believers act as well—and indeed act well.<sup>201</sup> While Calvin vehemently rejects the partly-partly schema of his Catholic opponents, he affirms that “man’s action is not taken away by the movement of the Holy Spirit, because the will, which is directed to aspire to good, is of nature.”<sup>202</sup> Moreover, because God liberates our will, “nothing now prevents us from saying that we ourselves are fitly doing what God’s Spirit is doing in us, even if our will contributes nothing of itself distinct from his grace.”<sup>203</sup> Calvin, therefore, is willing to concede that believers indeed act in pursuing and performing

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<sup>197</sup> *BLW* 174, *COR* IV/III:253.

<sup>198</sup> *Inst.* 2.5.14 (1539), *OS* 3:314.

<sup>199</sup> Melancthon, *CTT* 59-60, *CR* 21:656, also emphasizes the necessary activity of the Spirit in cultivating within believers the “spiritual desires which God commands” (cf. 61, *CR* 21:658; *Romans* 37, *CR* 15:523).

<sup>200</sup> *BLW* 174, *COR* IV/III:253. Cf. *Comm.* Phil. 2:13, *COR* II/XVI:330: “There are, in any action, two principal parts, the will, and the effective power. Both of these [Paul] ascribes wholly to God”; and *Inst.* 2.3.10 (1559), *OS* 3:285: “[God] does not promise through Ezekiel that he will give a new Spirit to his elect only in order that they may be able to walk according to his precepts, but also that they may actually so walk.”

<sup>201</sup> *Inst.* 2.5.14 (1559), *OS* 3:314. Cf. *BLW* 172, *COR* IV/III:250. In his polemic with Pighius, Calvin was forced to recognize certain teachings of Augustine. See Anthony N.S. Lane, “Bondage and Liberation in Calvin’s Treatise against Pighius,” in *Calvin Studies IX: Papers Presented at the Ninth Colloquium on Calvin Studies*, eds. John H. Leith and Robert A. Johnson (Davidson College, NC: Davidson College and Davidson College Presbyterian Church, 1998), 39-45.

<sup>202</sup> *Inst.* 2.5.14 (1559), *OS* 3:314-315.

<sup>203</sup> *Inst.* 2.5.15 (1539,1559), *OS* 3:315.

righteousness—so long as it is understood that the ability to will and do well does not originate in themselves but in God, who causes them to live according to his law.<sup>204</sup>

Calvin speaks of sanctification or renewal as a conversion to God, consisting in two distinct, progressive acts: mortification of sin and vivification of the spirit.<sup>205</sup> And both mortification and vivification “happen to us by participation in Christ. For if we truly partake of his death, ‘our old man is crucified by his power, and the body of sin perishes’ [Rom. 6.6], that the corruption of original nature may no longer thrive. If we share in his resurrection, through it we are raised up into newness of life to correspond with the righteousness of God.”<sup>206</sup> Because sanctification is the result of Spirit-created union with Christ, it is ultimately a divine work not based on human merit. The Christian life is not autonomous but a participation in the work of Christ by the power of the Spirit, who imparts Christ’s righteousness to believers and directs them toward righteousness and holiness.<sup>207</sup>

In no way, however, does Calvin suggest that believers can attain perfection in this life. Like Luther, Bucer, and other Reformers, Calvin teaches that believers are still sinful.<sup>208</sup> While the image of God is now manifested in part in believers, “it will attain its full splendor in heaven.”<sup>209</sup> Further, as Paul explains in Romans 7:14-25, the believer is divided, serving both God and sin.<sup>210</sup> Mortification and vivification are gradual, and until believers are fully conformed to Christ, “remains” or “remnants of the flesh” reside in them.<sup>211</sup> Consequently, believers experience incredible discord between “flesh and spirit.” Calvin understands “flesh” (*carnis*) in Romans 7 as “all that men bring from the

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<sup>204</sup> Melancthon, *CTT* 66, *CR* 21:663, similarly teaches that “aided by the Holy Spirit [man] can do right.”

<sup>205</sup> *Inst.* 3.3.5 (1536,1539), *OS* 4:59-60. Melancthon, *Romans* 144-147, *CR* 15:635-638, also teaches that our renewal consists in mortification and vivification.

<sup>206</sup> *Inst.* 3.3.9 (1536,1539), *OS* 4:63.

<sup>207</sup> On mortification/vivification, especially in relation to *unio*, see Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 133.

<sup>208</sup> Luther’s understanding is perhaps best captured in his famous concept *simul iustus et peccator* (see *Lectures on Romans* in *LW* 25:63,260 [*WA* 56:70,272]). On Bucer’s understanding of the believer’s imperfections, see Lugioyo, *Bucer’s Doctrine of Justification*, 145-146. Melancthon, *CTT* 177-179, *CR* 21:768-770, also affirms the imperfections of believers and their works.

<sup>209</sup> *Inst.* 1.15.4 (1559), *OS* 3:180.

<sup>210</sup> See especially *Comm. Rom.* 7:14-25, *COR* II/XIII:143-151, a key location for Calvin’s discussion of the divided Christian. Cf. Raith, *After Merit*, 115-119, on whom I rely in what follows.

<sup>211</sup> *Comm. Rom.* 7:14,15,18, *COR* II/XIII:143,145,147.

womb”<sup>212</sup> or “all the endowments of [corrupted] human nature, and everything that is in man, except the sanctification of the Spirit,”<sup>213</sup> and “spirit” (*spiritus*) as “the renewing of our corrupt nature, while God reforms us after His own image,”<sup>214</sup> or “that part of the soul which the Spirit of God has purified from evil and so refashioned that the image of God shines forth within it.”<sup>215</sup> While the regenerate truly “aspire to God with a special desire of their heart, seek heavenly righteousness, and hate sin, they are drawn back again to the earth by the remnants of their flesh.”<sup>216</sup> This does not mean, however, that believers are totally incapable of performing the good they desire, but that their ability is unequal to their desire.<sup>217</sup> Thus, while believers indeed perform righteousness, they “never reach the goal of righteousness as long as they dwell in the flesh.”<sup>218</sup> While our experiential restoration is begun in this life, it will not be completed until the eschaton.

## 2.4. Conclusion

Following the trajectory of Calvin’s anthropology, we find that his understanding of human nature and ability is indeed complex. Made in God’s image, original humanity was created with dignity and the ability to comprehend God, obey his commands, and attain eternal bliss. The ability to do so, however, did not reside *in se*, as if the first humans existed autonomously apart from God. Rather, they were created in a state of communion with God, the source of life and adventitious gifts. These adventitious gifts regulated the natural ones (mind and will) and enabled them to function as God intended. Yet when the first humans alienated themselves from God by disbelieving him, the adventitious gifts were withdrawn and their entire nature was corrupted. Consequently, the mind is so darkened that it cannot attain a true knowledge of God, and the will is so bound that it cannot choose what God commands. This does not mean, however, that sinful humans cannot will or do *any* good, but that they cannot will and do the *spiritual* good, as Raith explains. They are unable to satisfy God’s law, which demands absolute righteousness, and prove themselves holy in his sight. To be saved, they must look outside themselves to the one who has fulfilled all righteousness on their

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<sup>212</sup> *Comm. Rom. 7:14, COR II/XIII:143.*

<sup>213</sup> *Comm. Rom. 7:18, COR II/XIII:147.*

<sup>214</sup> *Comm. Rom. 7:14, COR II/XIII:143.*

<sup>215</sup> *Comm. Rom. 7:18, COR II/XIII:147.*

<sup>216</sup> *Comm. Rom. 7:15, COR II/XIII:145.*

<sup>217</sup> *Comm. Rom. 7:18, COR II/XIII:147-148.*

<sup>218</sup> *Comm. Rom. 7:25, COR II/XIII:151.*



behalf. Only in Christ, therefore, are humans restored to God's favor and renewed in nature. This restoration and healing is received in the *duplex gratia* of justification and sanctification, which are communicated to believers when they are united to Christ by the Spirit. While justification is a forensic act whereby believers are declared righteous on account of Christ's merits, sanctification is the gradual process whereby they are made righteous by the indwelling Spirit. Consequently, they are once again able to comprehend, will, and even perform righteousness, though imperfectly.

Moreover, we find parallelisms in Calvin's accounts of creation, fall, and redemption that point to the priority of communion/union in his understanding of human nature and ability. While Calvin acknowledges human agency in pursuing and performing the spiritual good both before the fall and in the Christian life, he stresses that the ability to do so does not originate from humans. Such ability is made possible only by the presence of adventitious gifts, which were given to humans at creation in communion with God and are restored to believers in union with Christ. Thus, human nature, both at creation and in redemption, needs grace in order to function rightly—and grace is not given apart from personal connection to the Creator and Redeemer. Believers are able to pursue and perform righteousness because they are animated and guided by the Spirit. This is the necessary context for understanding Calvin's positive notion of works-righteousness.

## Chapter 3

# Good Works and Divine Acceptance

Having established Calvin's teaching on human nature and ability, we are now prepared to assess his understanding of the value and role of good works in the lives of believers. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, good works are not an afterthought for Calvin. As he states in his account of original humanity, nothing was better than for humans to cultivate righteousness.<sup>1</sup> And since the *Evangelii finis* is to become like God (the righteous one) and to have his image (which consists in righteousness and holiness) increasingly restored within us, then conformity to God's righteousness is the goal of the Christian life.

This chapter focuses on Calvin's understanding of good works in relation to divine acceptance, with the particular aim of adjudicating not simply *whether* but *how* Calvin espouses a form of justification by works. As mentioned in chapter 1, only a few scholars have argued that Calvin holds a positive notion of works-righteousness and even espouses a form of justification by works. The goal here is to build upon their work by not only discussing more extensively the somewhat mystifying statements Calvin makes regarding believers' good works in relation to divine acceptance, but also taking into account statements by Calvin not analyzed in their studies. I do not intend to analyze why so few interpreters have argued for positive notions of works-righteousness and justification by works in Calvin. However, that these themes are underappreciated in scholarship likely results from the fact that Calvin often expresses a negative attitude toward works, which no doubt eclipses for many readers his more positive statements regarding good works. Proceeding, we will explore Calvin's understanding of: (1) personal righteousness within the contexts of justification and sanctification, and the extent to which believers' works may be called righteous; (2) God's acceptance of believers' good works; and (3) God's acceptance of believers themselves on account of their works. After discussing these teachings, we will consider (4) his positive formulation of justification by works.

### 3.1. Personal Righteousness

Calvin understands righteousness in absolute terms—namely, to be righteous requires fulfilling God's law. Yet fulfilling the law is only hypothetical, since all humans, except

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<sup>1</sup> *Inst.* 2.1.4 (1559), *OS* 3:232.

Christ, are sinful.<sup>2</sup> Thus, no one can claim to be righteous, and works are excluded from justification. However, Calvin also teaches that a righteousness exceeding the law exists and that even if we could fulfill the law, we still could not stand righteous *coram Deo*, since God is infinitely loftier than we.<sup>3</sup> We can stand righteous before God only by distrusting ourselves and looking to Christ's absolute righteousness. When expounding justification, then, Calvin rejects the notion of personal righteousness.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as chapter 2 demonstrated, Calvin also teaches that believers have the adventitious gifts of righteousness and holiness restored to them and thus are able to pursue and perform the spiritual good. Once God gives them a new spirit, their hearts are conformed to his law; once he liberates their wills, they are able to obey his commands, though imperfectly.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of regeneration, Calvin explains, "is to manifest in the life of believers a harmony and agreement between God's righteousness and their obedience."<sup>6</sup> The Christian life, therefore, is about continual renewal that leads to the cultivation of righteousness.<sup>7</sup> And Calvin admits that this righteousness belongs to believers. He affirms human righteousness within the context of sanctification, because believers are being renewed by the Spirit.<sup>8</sup>

One reason Calvin affirms human righteousness within the context of sanctification is that believers play an active role, by cooperating with divine grace, in pursuing and performing righteousness.<sup>9</sup> Believers are "animate and living tools" that

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<sup>2</sup> On Calvin's understanding of absolute righteousness, see Coxhead, "Justification by Works," 7-18.

<sup>3</sup> *Inst.* 3.12.1 (1559), *OS* 4:209. On Calvin's concept of double righteousness/justice—one righteous peculiar to God and veiled from humans, and another that is accommodated to human capacity, revealed in the law—see JoFn Balserak, *Divinity Compromised: A Study of Divine Accommodation in the Thought of John Calvin* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 69-70; Helm, *Calvin's Ideas*, chapter 10; Raith, *After Merit*, 139-140; Susan E. Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Calvin's Exegesis of Job from Medieval and Modern Perspectives* (Chicago: UCP, 1994), 91-155; Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), 113. Helm (289-295) takes issue with Schreiner, who, in analyzing Calvin's Job sermons, questions whether God, according to his secret justice, could judge unfallen angels as faulty. Helm demonstrates that "faulty" does not mean "sinful." According to Calvin, Helm argues, "faultiness," the capability to fail, is inherent to creatureliness, and no one, even unfallen angels, are righteous *a se* except God.

<sup>4</sup> See Lane, "Calvin and Article 5," 261.

<sup>5</sup> *Inst.* 2.3.6 (1539, 1559), *OS* 3:279-280; *Inst.* 3.3.14 (1539), *OS* 4:70-71.

<sup>6</sup> *Inst.* 3.6.1 (1559), *OS* 4:146. Cf. *Inst.* 3.3.9 (1539), *OS* 4:63.

<sup>7</sup> See Lane, "Calvin and Article 5," 260.

<sup>8</sup> See *ibid.*, 260-261; Wright, *Calvin's Salvation*, 230.

<sup>9</sup> On Calvin's understanding of cooperation with grace, see Lane, "Anthropology," 286-287.

God uses to accomplish his work within them.<sup>10</sup> While Calvin rejects his opponents' understanding of cooperating grace,<sup>11</sup> he does not dismiss the notion altogether and instead embraces Augustine's understanding of it.<sup>12</sup> Contra Pighius, whom Calvin understood to teach that human power is aided by divine grace, Calvin follows Augustine in teaching that the will does not need to be *assisted* but *transformed* or *renewed* in order to do good.<sup>13</sup> Further, God does not simply transform the sinner by initial grace and then leave him to utilize subsequent grace like "a tool which can help someone if he is pleased to stretch out his hand and to [take] it."<sup>14</sup> Rather, God effectively moves the believer to will and perform the spiritual good. And "this does not happen once, so that people are subsequently left to themselves, but they are steered on a steady course, so that their perseverance in goodness is no less the gift of God than their beginning it."<sup>15</sup> Calvin cites Augustine approvingly:

For [God] himself begins by working in us so that we will [the good], and also completes the work by cooperating with us when we will. Thus he works without us to cause us to will, but when we will and will so as to act, he cooperates with us; but without his help (whether by working so that we will or by cooperating when we do will) we are powerless to do the works which are our duty.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, Calvin explains, "We must not imagine that man, *by some power of his own*, cooperates with God when he obeys the direction of the Spirit."<sup>17</sup> Rather, what it means for God to "act with us" is that "by the continuous supply of his aid, he assists, increases, and strengthens that power which he has granted us, both for the completion of each particular work and for final perseverance though life."<sup>18</sup> The desire and ability to perform any spiritually good deed comes from God's grace.

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<sup>10</sup> *BLW* 152, *COR* IV/III:228. Cf. Dancy, "The Transformed Individual," 77,193.

<sup>11</sup> See *Inst.* 2.2.6 (mainly 1539), *OS* 3:248-249; *Inst.* 2.3.11-13 (mainly 1539), *OS* 3:286-290; Lane, "Anthropology," 286; Raith, *After Merit*, 69-74,111.

<sup>12</sup> See Lane, "Anthropology," 287.

<sup>13</sup> *BLW* 114-115,123-124, *COR* IV/III:185-187,195-196.

<sup>14</sup> *BLW* 114, *COR* IV/III:186. Cf. *BLW* 136,174, *COR* IV/III:209,252.

<sup>15</sup> *BLW* 136, *COR* IV/III:209.

<sup>16</sup> *BLW* 122-123, *COR* IV/III:195; cf. Augustine, *Grace and Free Choice* 17.33 in *NPNF* 5:458. Cf. *Inst.* 2.3.11 (1559), *OS* 3:287; Hunsinger, "Two Simultaneities," 322: "The believer cooperates with operation of grace without effecting the praiseworthy results."

<sup>17</sup> *BLW* 175, *COR* IV/III:253. Cf. *BLW* 225, *COR* IV/III:308.

<sup>18</sup> *BLW* 123, *COR* IV/III:196. Melancthon, *CTT* 171, *CR* 21:762, similarly teaches that the ability to perform good works is possible only by God's continuous activity, because good works are prepared, commanded, ordained, begun, aided, and established by God.

Yet Calvin also admits that “part of the action is ascribed to us” because our wills have been “made good” by God’s Spirit.<sup>19</sup> Calvin means not that humans and God share responsibility in the performance of any spiritually good act, but that God and believers act simultaneously.<sup>20</sup> In the *Institutio*, he writes, “If it is meant that after we are once subdued by the power of the Lord to the obedience of righteousness, we proceed voluntarily, and are inclined to follow the movement of grace, I have nothing to object.”<sup>21</sup> And responding to Pighius, “We agree that labour and striving are needed on both sides. Nor do we deny that the struggle is of such a kind as both to involve the whole of a person’s dedication.”<sup>22</sup> Calvin opposes not the notion of human activity but the idea that humans act alongside God, as if God does his part and believers do theirs.<sup>23</sup> “The question is only whether we fight for God with our own strength, or he supplies from heaven the skill, the courage, the hands, the strength, and the weapons.”<sup>24</sup> Calvin believed Pighius, and other Catholics, granted only a small part to God while claiming a greater role for ourselves. For Calvin, however, God is the primary agent who supplies everything we need and so moves us that we participate in his activity.<sup>25</sup> Calvin writes, “It is not that we ourselves do nothing or that we without any movement of our will are driven to act by pressure from him, but that we act while being acted upon by him. We will as he guides our heart, we endeavor as he rouses us, we succeed in our endeavor as he gives us strength . . . while he is the leader and the finisher of the work.”<sup>26</sup> More specifically, the Spirit “makes us fruitful to bring forth the buds of righteousness.”<sup>27</sup> No

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<sup>19</sup> BLW 123, COR IV/III:195.

<sup>20</sup> See Raith, *After Merit*, 113-114.

<sup>21</sup> *Inst.* 2.3.11 (1539) (Beveridge), OS 3:287-288.

<sup>22</sup> BLW 152, COR IV/III:227.

<sup>23</sup> Raith, *After Merit*, 69-74, 111-115, helpfully relays Calvin’s rejection of a competitive divine-human causality (a partly-partly schema) and affirmation of a noncompetitive causality.

<sup>24</sup> BLW 152, COR IV/III:227.

<sup>25</sup> Raith, *After Merit*, 111, explains, “Calvin’s polemic against merit and ‘cooperation’ counter [a] competitive-causal framework by setting forth a noncompetitive, participatory relationship between God’s activity and human activity.” As Raith notes, the participatory dimensions of Calvin’s soteriology have received renewed interest in recent years (e.g., Billings, *Calvin*; Julie Canlis, *Calvin’s Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010]; idem. “Calvin, Osiander and Participation in God,” *IJST* 6.2 (2004): 169-184; Garcia, *Life in Christ*).

<sup>26</sup> BLW 152, COR IV/III:227-228.

<sup>27</sup> *Inst.* 3.1.3 (1539/1559), OS 4:4.

competition exists between the Spirit's activity and the believer's.<sup>28</sup> Both agents act simultaneously, though the Spirit is the primary cause of the believer's obedience<sup>29</sup>:

[The Spirit] is described as the 'spring' [John 4:14] whence all heavenly riches flow forth to us; or as the "hand of God" [Acts 5:11, 21], by which he exercises his might. For by the inspiration of his power he so breathes divine life into us that we are no longer actuated by ourselves, but are ruled by his action and prompting. Accordingly, whatever good things are in us are the fruits of his grace; and without him our gifts are darkness of mind and perversity of heart [cf. Gal. 5:19-21].<sup>30</sup>

Believers cultivate righteousness only when moved by grace. Just as prelapsarian humanity did not act independently from God but drew all their life and strength from the Creator, so believers participate in Christ by the Spirit.<sup>31</sup> Further, because believers' hearts have been quickened and liberated by the Spirit, they voluntarily obey God and his law.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Calvin's understanding of the Christian life as both synergistic and monergistic. It is synergistic in that, as Raith explains, "*both* human and divine activity are *simultaneously* involved in the production of any *particular* good work."<sup>33</sup> Yet it is monergistic in that God is the primary causal agent. Everything humans require to obey

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<sup>28</sup> Raith, *After Merit*, 111.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-114.

<sup>30</sup> *Inst.* 3.1.3 (1559,1539,1536), *OS* 4:4-5. Calvin is similar to Bucer in his teaching on cooperation and the pursuit of *iustitia*. Lugioyo explains Bucer's view: "Because faith comes with the bestowal of the Spirit of Christ, they become possessed by him so that believers now live in him and he in them. In this sense of mutual inhabitation, Christians are allowed to cooperate with God in salvation, since these works are not their own but the work of Christ in them. This agency is expressed in Bucer primarily in terms of the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, being clothed with Christ, participation in Christ, being in communion with Christ, and so forth" (*Bucer's Doctrine of Justification*, 96-97). See *B.Rom.* 119; Lugioyo, *Bucer's Doctrine of Justification*, 224. Cf. W.P. Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Martin Bucer* (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), 78. Bucer and Calvin are willing to speak of cooperation with God in salvation, meaning the ability to act comes from God by participation in Christ and empowerment by the Spirit (Lane, "Calvin and Article 5," 257).

<sup>31</sup> See *Comm. Rom.* 6, wherein Calvin explains that baptized believers become one with Christ, grow into one body with him, and become new creatures by participating in his resurrection. On the participatory dimensions of Calvin's *Rom.* 6 comments, see Billings, *Calvin*, 61-62; *idem.*, "Union with Christ: Calvin's Theology and Its Early Reception," in *Calvin's Theology and Its Reception: Disputes, Developments, and New Possibilities*, eds. J. Todd Billings and I. John Hesselink (Louisville: WJKP, 2012), 54-55; Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 119-133; Raith, *After Merit*, 112-113; *idem.*, *Aquinas and Calvin on Romans: God's Justification and Our Participation* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 115-146.

<sup>32</sup> Lane, "Anthropology," 283-284.

<sup>33</sup> Raith, *After Merit*, 113-114. Raith further explains, "God does not play his part *and then* human beings play their part, with the result that the human actor produces a particular work that God then evaluates. Nor is it the case that God acts *without* the causal activity of the human person, as if human persons are passive and otherwise inanimate instruments. Instead, God is fully involved in the production of the work but without negating human participation in his work" (114).

God is supplied by his efficacious grace. Yet God does not work apart from believers' activity in conforming their lives to his law. He has created and re-created them in such a way that they themselves will and do well when moved upon by him.<sup>34</sup> Again, believers do not act autonomously. God is the one who leads believers to obey his law, yet they are nevertheless considered active agents in cultivating righteousness.<sup>35</sup>

Still, how is Calvin willing to refer to the obedience of believers, who are still sinful, as "righteousness" when he has stressed that righteousness is absolute obedience to God's law? Coxhead argues that Calvin understands righteousness not solely as *absolute* or *perfect* obedience but also as *relative* holiness.<sup>36</sup> Calvin himself admits that a "partial righteousness" exists in believers' works, and that the Lord accepts them as wholly righteous.<sup>37</sup> He even calls this righteousness "real" but quickly shows, drawing from Paul's discussion of the divided Christian, that it is imperfect.<sup>38</sup> He also explains that the only righteousness believers possess is Christ's perfect righteousness and that those reckoned righteous are not so in reality. Moreover, he asserts that partial righteousness is a fiction, because the only righteousness accepted in heaven is perfect obedience.<sup>39</sup> Why does Calvin state in one place that God rejects partial righteousness but elsewhere that God accepts it? To answer this, we must consider Calvin's so-called "double justification."

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<sup>34</sup> *Antidote* in *Tracts* 3:111-112, *CO* 7:445-446.

<sup>35</sup> See *Inst.* 2.5.5 (1539), *OS* 3:303; *BLW* 163, *COR* IV/III:239. Calvin regularly ascribes an active role to believers in their sanctification. E.g., *Inst.* 3.7 (1539-1559), *OS* 4:151-161, wherein he connects self-denial to mortification/vivification and urges readers to take specific actions in repudiating their selfish desires so they may seek their neighbors' good and glorify God.

Cf. Boisset, "Justification et Sanctification chez Calvin," 145, who explains that Calvin expresses a paradox that "believers act passively." According to Boisset, Calvin teaches that believers truly work because they have experienced a transformation in mind and will through conversion. The *matérialité* of their work is indeed their own. They are passive, however, because *l'inspiration* to work, or obey God, does not originate from them.

<sup>36</sup> Coxhead, "Justification by Works," 6-11. Throughout this study, I will use Coxhead's classification of "relative" righteousness/obedience in reference to believers' imperfect good works.

<sup>37</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.10 (1543), *OS* 4:263.

<sup>38</sup> *Inst.* 3.11.11 (1559), *OS* 4:194.

<sup>39</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.13 (1559), *OS* 4:232.

### 3.2. Double Justification

For Calvin, Christians are liberated from the *reign* of sin but not the *presence* of sin.<sup>40</sup>

Although the Spirit renews believers and creates virtues within them, leading them into experiential righteousness, the good works performed by believers are tainted by sin.

Calvin illustrates, “If a wine is the best in the world and it is put in a foul-smelling cask or in a dirty bottle, the wine is ruined. That is the way it is with all our works. For to the extent God guides and directs us in them by his Holy Spirit, they are good and holy and praiseworthy. But let us consider the kind of vessels we are, filled with infection and stench. Consequently, our works are corrupt.”<sup>41</sup> Calvin carefully explains that it is not the Spirit’s work within us but our participation in his activity that is imperfect. Thus, our works judged *in se* merit neither God’s acceptance nor reward since he requires absolute righteousness.<sup>42</sup> This is why Calvin says that partial righteousness is a fiction.

Yet he also teaches that God graciously accepts our imperfect works as if they were perfect. Like Luther, who teaches that “works are acceptable not for their own sake but because of faith,”<sup>43</sup> Calvin teaches that our works are acceptable on account of faith.<sup>44</sup> Yet Calvin also uses *iustifico* in explaining that our works are acceptable *coram Deo*. Because we are grafted into Christ, “we can deservedly say that by faith alone not only we ourselves but our works as well are justified.”<sup>45</sup> Scholars have branded this Calvin’s concept of “double justification,”<sup>46</sup> though Calvin himself never uses the

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<sup>40</sup> See *Inst.* 3.3.10-11 (mainly 1543), *OS* 4:65-67; *Serm.* Gen. 15:6 (2:359-360), *SC* XI/2:772; *Comm.* Rom. 7:15, *COR* II/XIII:145; Lane, “Anthropology,” 285.

<sup>41</sup> *Serm.* Gen. 15:6 (2:360), *SC* XI/2:772.

<sup>42</sup> On the value of good works, see Lane, “The Role of Scripture,” 373-375; Raith, *After Merit*, 137-141.

<sup>43</sup> *Treatise on Good Works* in *LW* 44:26, *WA* 6:206. Zwingli, *Fidei Expositio* in *RC* 1:201, Niemeyer 56-57; and Melancthon, *CTT* 181-182, *CR* 21:771-773; *Romans* 43, *CR* 15:529, also teach that works are acceptable to God when faith is present and precedes.

<sup>44</sup> See *Comm.* Acts 10:4, *COR* II/XII.1:297; W.H. Neuser (ed.), *Die Vorbereitung der Religionsgespräche von Worms und Regensburg 1540/41* (Neukirchener Verlag, 1974), 129, wherein Calvin is recorded to have suggested at the Worms Colloquy that an inchoate and incomplete righteousness pleases God, though only on account of faith, which brings about participation in Christ’s perfect righteousness.

<sup>45</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.10 (1543), *OS* 4:263. Cf. *Inst.* 3.17.3 (1539), *OS* 4:255; *Comm.* Rom. 3:22, *COR* II/XIII:71.

<sup>46</sup> E.g., Horton, *Justification*, 1:216; Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 33-36; idem., “The Role of Scripture,” 375-377; Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 135-136; Parker, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Justification,” *EQ* 24 (1952): 105; Raith, *After Merit*, 141-144 (Raith does not use the terminology of “double justification” and instead speaks of “God’s *acceptatio* of human works”); Venema, *Accepted and Renewed*, 163-170; Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 300-302. Cf. Eberhard Busch, “Glaube und gute Werke: Calvins Verständnis der Rechtfertigungslehre,” *Zwingliana* 28 (2001): 42. Garcia calls the classification “double justification” an “ambiguous



terminology, which is different from Bucer's so-called "double" or "twofold justification." Bucer affirms both justification of the ungodly and justification of the godly.<sup>47</sup> Or as Horst-Martin Barnikol explains, "Therefore, Bucer, teaches a *double justification* [iustificatio duplex], a justification which, as the first justification, happens initially by faith alone, but then as the second justification which, happening through works, occurs immediately in the space of sanctification."<sup>48</sup> Both Bucer's and Calvin's respective concepts differ from double justification in the strict sense, which espouses two separate groundings for justification—faith and works.<sup>49</sup> Further, according to Calvin, just as justification of persons consists in non-imputation of sins and imputation of Christ's righteousness, so does justification of works.<sup>50</sup> Our works *in se* "only arouse God's vengeance unless they be sustained by his merciful pardon."<sup>51</sup> Whatever is imperfect in our works "is covered by Christ's perfection."<sup>52</sup> Consequently, our works "are accounted righteous, or . . . reckoned as righteousness."<sup>53</sup> In this sense, therefore, our good works are distinguished "by the name of righteousness,"<sup>54</sup> even if they are only partially righteous.

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sobriquet" (*Life in Christ*, 146), because it could imply that justification has a dual grounding—partly in Christ's righteousness and partly in human works (141n.133). Garcia argues that his "replication principle," which we discussed in chapter 1, better captures the framework of Calvin's understanding of the necessity of good works in the lives of those justified (141n.133;146).

<sup>47</sup> E.g., *B.Rom.* 231-232; Lugioyo, *Bucer's Doctrine of Justification*, 229-230.

<sup>48</sup> Horst-Martin Barnikol, *Bucers Lehre von der Rechtfertigung: Dargestellt an seinem Römerbriefkommentar* (Kamen: Hartmut Spenner, 2014), 118: "So lehrt Bucer eine *doppelte Rechtfertigung* (iustificatio duplex), eine Rechtfertigung, die als *erste* Rechtfertigung zunächst allein aus Glauben geschieht, die sich aber dann als *zweite*, durch die Werke geschehende Rechtfertigung im Raume der Heiligung unmittelbar fortsetzt." (cf. 108-21). Cf. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 252-253; Stephens, *The Holy Spirit*, 53-55.

<sup>49</sup> See Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 141; Lugioyo, *Bucer's Doctrine of Justification*, 46; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 252.

<sup>50</sup> Parker, "Calvin's Doctrine of Justification," 105.

<sup>51</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.16 (1539), *OS* 4:234.

<sup>52</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.8 (1539), *OS* 4:261. Cf. *Inst.* 3.17.5 (1539), *OS* 4:258, wherein Calvin states that God accepts believers' works "in Christ rather than in themselves." Cf. Zwingli, *Sixty-Seven Articles*, Article 22 in *RC* 1:5, Niemeyer 6-7: "Christ is our righteousness. From this we conclude that our works are good insofar as they are Christ's; but insofar as they are ours, they are neither right nor good"; and Melancthon, *Romans* 149, *CR* 15:640, who states that God accepts our imperfect obedience on account of Christ (cf. *Romans* 105,115, *CR* 15:594,605; *CTT* 181, *CR* 21:771-772).

<sup>53</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.8 (1539), *OS* 4:262.

<sup>54</sup> *Antidote* in *Tracts* 3:128, *CO* 7:458.

The reason God adjudges our works righteous is that he examines them “according to his tenderness, not his supreme right.”<sup>55</sup> Moreover, “Of his own fatherly generosity and loving-kindness, and without considering their worth, [God] raises works to this place of honor, so that he attributes some values to them.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, God acts toward our works as he acts toward us: as a gracious and benevolent Father, not a strict Judge. Calvin emphasizes that God is not obligated to accept our works, since they are tainted and thus damnable *in se*.<sup>57</sup> But in his mercy, God accepts the gifts he has placed in believers.<sup>58</sup> God, therefore, is acting faithfully toward himself and not just graciously toward believers.

In accepting or justifying our works, God is not arbitrarily or fictitiously calling evil works good, or vice virtue.<sup>59</sup> Calvin indeed calls our imperfect good works *good*.<sup>60</sup> As Lane explains, “It is not that the works of Christians are indistinguishable from those of non-Christians, God deciding to accept the former but not that latter. These are genuinely good works in that they are done in faith from a genuine love for God and neighbor.”<sup>61</sup> Although believers’ good works are imperfect, they may still be called righteous because they flow from the Spirit, who is renewing believers and causing them to love God and neighbor in sincerity of heart. Thus, justification of works differs slightly from justification of persons. As Raith explains,

In terms of the doctrine of justification, there is *nothing* of worth in the sinner that *in any way* influences God’s decision to grant the sinner the ability to have faith in Christ and consequently have her sins forgiven and Christ’s justice imputed; the sinner is totally void of any “good” pertinent to godliness and righteousness before God’s gift of justification. In terms of works justified by faith, however, there *is* some good in the believer’s works prior (logically,

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<sup>55</sup> *Inst* 3.15.4 (1539), *OS* 4:243.

<sup>56</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.3 (1539), *OS* 4:256. Cf. *Inst.* 3.17.15 (1539), *OS* 4:269; *Reform in Tracts* 1:164-165, *CO* 6:487.

<sup>57</sup> On the damnable of believers’ imperfect good works, see Raith, *After Merit*, 125-130, 137-144.

<sup>58</sup> Calvin approvingly quotes Augustine stating that God “crowns his own gifts.” E.g., *Comm. Gen.* 7:1, *CO* 23:129; *Inst.* 3.25.10 (1559), *OS* 4:454.

<sup>59</sup> Lane, “The Role of Scripture,” 375.

<sup>60</sup> See *Inst.* 3.17.1 (1539), *OS* 4:253.

<sup>61</sup> Lane, “The Role of Scripture,” 375; cf. *idem.*, *Justification by Faith*, 33-34. Raith, *After Merit*, 143, critiques Lane’s description of believers’ works as “genuinely good,” arguing that it is better to describe them as possessing “a level of goodness that God accepts” since in reality they are “genuinely damnable.” It is clear from the contexts of Raith’s and Lane’s studies that both see believers’ good works as imperfect and not good to the fullest degree.

though not necessary chronologically) to their being “justified” due to the regenerating work of the Spirit giving rise to these works.<sup>62</sup>

Again, this does not mean good works merit divine acceptance. Calvin stresses that perfect righteousness alone pleases God and that our imperfect works only rouse his anger. Yet God graciously accepts our imperfect good works “because he wills to value them so much . . . even though they do not deserve it.”<sup>63</sup>

Another reason God accepts believers’ works is he has already accepted their persons and adopted them as children, who are being renewed after Christ’s image. Justification of the sinner, then, is logically requisite to justification of works. Preaching on Genesis 15:6, Calvin states,

When [God] receives us initially, he can justify none of the works which are in us. Why not? They are all bad. For, as we have said, what can a corrupt tree bear? (Cf. Matt. 7:17.) So God, when drawing to himself poor sinners who are rejected and banished from his kingdom and his church, does not justify their works but, seeing their wretchedness and having pity on them as being lost, justifies them. Now after receiving them, he justifies them in their persons, that is, they are acceptable to him as his children, and then he justifies their works.<sup>64</sup>

Regeneration must also precede justification of works: “Purification of heart must precede, in order that those works which come forth from us may be favorably received by God.”<sup>65</sup>

The reason Calvin says believers possess a partial righteousness is that God has graciously willed to accept their imperfect works as wholly righteous, though they are not so in reality.<sup>66</sup>

### 3.3. Double Acceptance

Calvin teaches not just that God accepts believers’ imperfect good works as wholly righteous, but also that works are a basis for divine acceptance. Stated differently, God accepts not only believers’ *works* but also *believers themselves* on account of their

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<sup>62</sup> Raith, *After Merit*, 143 (emphasis original).

<sup>63</sup> *BLW* 26, *COR* IV/III:94. On God’s will to accept imperfect good works, see Raith, *After Merit*, 141-144.

<sup>64</sup> *Serm.* Gen. 15:6. (2:360), *SC* XI/2:772. Cf. *Inst.* 3.14.13 (1539), *OS* 4:232; *Antidote* in *Tracts* 3:128, *CO* 7:458. Melancthon, *CTT* 181, *CR* 21:771-772; *Romans* 109,111,149, *CR* 15:598,600,640, expresses a similar idea—that works please God *after* or *because* a person is justified by faith.

<sup>65</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.8 (1539), *OS* 4:227.

<sup>66</sup> See Raith, *After Merit*, 141-144; Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 33-39.

works. This is his concept of “double acceptance.”<sup>67</sup> Commenting on apparent contradictions in Scripture—that one’s acceptance *coram Deo* is based on faith alone, on one hand, and good works or holy living, on the other—Calvin exclaims, “But you can in no way make the Scriptural passages agree unless you recognize a double acceptance of man before God.”<sup>68</sup> Calvin thus presents another *duplex* in his applied soteriology. Because of Spirit-created union with Christ, believers receive the *duplex gratia* of justification and sanctification, and upon the *duplex gratia* is founded *duplex iustificatio*.<sup>69</sup> Because those justified are regenerated by and indwelt with God’s Spirit, they are able to perform good works that, while imperfect, please God. Granted, their works *in se* do not please him, because they are corrupted by sin and thus damnable. Nevertheless, God accepts/justifies the good deeds performed by persons he has already justified and regenerated. Thus, while justification of persons is based on Christ’s work *extra nos*, justification of works is based *somewhat* on Christ’s work through the Spirit *in nobis*. Yet Calvin also espouses a *duplex acceptatio*, with the secondary mode of acceptance being grounded in sanctification.<sup>70</sup>

Calvin details this in *Institutio* 3.17.4-6,<sup>71</sup> wherein he explains how Cornelius’ prayers could be considered a reason for divine blessing (Acts 10).<sup>72</sup> First, he denies that human works can procure divine favor, and thus that salvation is not wholly God’s gift but results partly from human merit. Calvin exclaims that when God first accepts a sinner, the sinner “is naked and bereft of all good . . . stuffed and laden with all kinds of

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<sup>67</sup> Calvin’s concept of double acceptance has received less attention than his notion of double justification in secondary literature, and treatments of the former are brief. E.g., Hunsinger, “Two Simultaneities,” 320-323; Lane, “The Role of Scripture,” 381-383; Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 135. These cited analyses are limited to Calvin’s discussion in the *Institutio*, yet this theme appears elsewhere in Calvin’s *corpus*, as will be demonstrated below. While Coxhead, “Justification by Works,” does not highlight the exact terminology of “double acceptance,” he recognizes Calvin’s concept of divine acceptance on account of works.

<sup>68</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.4 (1539), *OS* 4:256.

<sup>69</sup> While Calvin never uses the terminology *duplex iustificatio*, he employs the concept outlined above.

<sup>70</sup> Hunsinger, “Two Simultaneities,” 320.

<sup>71</sup> This does not mean, however, that Calvin does not teach double acceptance, or some aspect of it, outside these sections. He does, but the motif is seen most clearly in this cluster, wherein he addresses how Scripture can speak of works as reasons for divine acceptance and blessing. Nor does this mean that Calvin does not promote the teaching in other works. He does, as we shall see below, and what he teaches elsewhere elucidates what is in the *Institutio*.

<sup>72</sup> Calvin teaches the same concept of double acceptance in his *Comm.* Acts 10:35, *COR* II/XII.1:317-318, but I have elected to focus primarily on Calvin’s comments on Acts 10 in the *Institutio*, which relay his understanding of double acceptance more extensively than does his commentary.

evils.”<sup>73</sup> The sinner is unacceptable *in se* before God. Yet God graciously accepts the sinner on account of Christ’s righteousness. The first mode of acceptance, therefore, is based solely upon God’s gratuitous mercy set forth in Christ’s work *extra nos*.<sup>74</sup> This truth, Calvin explains, is the principle by which all other data in Scripture must be regulated: “not one syllable of Scripture can be cited contrary to this doctrine: God’s sole reason to receive man unto himself is that he sees him utterly lost if left to himself, but because he does not will him to be lost, he exercises his mercy in freeing him.”<sup>75</sup>

Yet Calvin believes Acts 10 speaks of another kind of acceptance, one based upon God’s regenerating work *in nobis*.<sup>76</sup> Since God has rescued the sinner from perdition, adopted him, and regenerated him, he “now embraces him as a new creature [cf. 2 Cor. 5:17] endowed with the gifts of his Spirit.” Moreover, believers are “approved of God *also in respect of works*” because the Spirit creates “good things” in them that please God.<sup>77</sup> When Calvin describes these qualities, he mentions ones akin to the adventitious gifts restored to believers in Christ by the Spirit: “Cornelius must have been already *illuminated by the Spirit of wisdom*, for he was endowed with *true wisdom*, that is, *the fear of God*; and he was sanctified by the same Spirit, for he was a keeper of *righteousness*, which the apostle taught to be the Spirit’s surest fruit [Gal. 5:5].”<sup>78</sup> We recall from chapter 2 that such qualities are integral to the *imago Dei*: when the adventitious gifts—which enable believers to cultivate righteousness—are restored to believers, believers reflect God’s character and are conformed increasingly to his image. God accepts his children, therefore, because “he sees the traces and lineaments of his own countenance.”<sup>79</sup>

Calvin explains further that when appealing to their righteousness before God, believers do not claim to live perfectly. Rather, when seeking divine approval, they simply contrast themselves with unbelievers:

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<sup>73</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.4 (1539), *OS* 4:256.

<sup>74</sup> Hunsinger “Two Simultaneities,” 320.

<sup>75</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.4 (1539), *OS* 4:257.

<sup>76</sup> See Hunsinger, “Two Simultaneities,” 320: “The one acceptance is based on Christ’s work apart from us (justification), while the second acceptance is based on Christ’s work in us by his Spirit (sanctification). The first acceptance presupposes that although in ourselves we are wholly unrighteous as sinners, in Christ and clothed in his righteousness, we are nonetheless wholly righteous before God.”

<sup>77</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.5 (1539), *OS* 4:257.

<sup>78</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.4 (1539), *OS* 4:257. See “2.1. Original Humanity” and “2.3. Redeemed Humanity,” on the supernatural gifts given at creation and restored in Christ.

<sup>79</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.5 (1539) (Beveridge), *OS* 4:257.

First, when it is a question of justifying man, it is not only required that he have a good cause in some particular matter but a certain harmony of righteousness, lasting throughout life. Yet the saints, while they appeal to God's judgment to approve their innocence, do not present themselves as free from all guilt and faultless in every respect; but while they have fixed their assurance of salvation in his goodness alone, they still, trusting in him as avenger of the poor afflicted beyond right and equity, assuredly commend to him the cause in which the innocent are oppressed.

On the other hand, when they hale their opponents with them before God's judgment seat, they do not boast of an innocence that under strict test would correspond to God's own purity; but because, in comparison with their adversaries' malice, dishonesty, craft, and wickedness, they know that their sincerity, righteousness, simplicity, and purity are known and pleasing to God, they are not afraid to call upon him to act as judge between themselves and their adversaries.<sup>80</sup>

Calvin asserts that believers, because of their difference from the unregenerate, can truly claim personal sincerity, justice, and purity and that by these they are acceptable to God. Calvin also contrasts justification with another acceptance, indicating that while works cannot justify, because only a life of *absolute* obedience justifies, they do render one acceptable to God in a *relative* sense. Thus, whereas the primary mode of acceptance is based upon Christ's absolute righteousness, which is imputed to believers, the secondary mode of acceptance is based upon relative or partial righteousness, which believers cultivate by the Spirit.

As Hunsinger notes, Calvin seems to be saying that our acceptance before God rests not solely on justification, but also on sanctification.<sup>81</sup> Hunsinger thus appropriately wonders: Is justification itself insufficient for salvation, specifically for divine acceptance?<sup>82</sup> In one sense, yes. For Calvin, salvation cannot be reduced to justification—standing righteous before God situationally.<sup>83</sup> God is discontent to leave believers unaffected experientially; he wants to renew his image within them by conforming them to his righteousness. Calvin's *duplex acceptatio*, therefore, is a way for him to expound the implications of the *duplex gratia*.<sup>84</sup> The *duplex gratia* is Calvin's way of rebutting Catholic accusations that the Reformers disregarded good works. Calvin believes one cannot receive justification without sanctification, lest Christ be

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<sup>80</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.14 (1539), *OS* 4:268.

<sup>81</sup> Hunsinger, "Two Simultaneities," 321.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> See "2.3. Redeemed Humanity"; Wright, *Calvin's Salvation*, 6.

<sup>84</sup> While Hunsinger does not explicitly state that Calvin's double acceptance is a way to explain the ramifications of the double grace, he writes, "The two-fold gift of grace correlates for Calvin not with a single, but with a double, divine acceptance" ("Two Simultaneities," 320).

divided. Believers possess either both gifts inseparably or neither at all. And if they do not possess both, they do not possess Christ and are thus separated from him. And if they are separated from him, they are unacceptable to God. In another sense, however, justification is indeed sufficient. Our sanctification, while progressive, is imperfect and thus cannot be the ultimate basis for divine acceptance. Believers, then, must always look to free pardon and imputation as the foundation of salvation.<sup>85</sup>

For this reason, Calvin surrounds his *duplex acceptatio* with heavy qualifications,<sup>86</sup> which *prima facie* may seem like retractions of his previous statements but actually are clarifications of what he sees as the mechanics of this secondary basis for acceptance. The reason God accepts believers as righteous on account of their works is twofold.<sup>87</sup> First, God is the one who creates such works in believers.<sup>88</sup> Calvin writes, “For the Lord cannot fail to love and embrace the good things that he works in them through his Spirit”<sup>89</sup> While believers cultivate righteousness, God is the originator of that righteousness. Therefore, while right conduct is not the “foundation” by which believers may stand before God, it is “the means whereby our most merciful Father introduces them into his fellowship, and protects and strengthens them therein.”<sup>90</sup> While Calvin sees God’s mercy as the *primary cause* of conforming believers to his righteousness, he is comfortable asserting that the lives of believers are the *means* by which God accepts them and brings them into deeper fellowship with himself, giving them a richer experience of his kingdom. Calvin explicates this in the closing of 3.17.6: “If one seeks the first cause that opens for the saints the door to God’s Kingdom, and hence gives them a permanent standing-ground in it, at once we answer: Because the Lord by his own mercy has adopted them once for all, and keeps them continually. But if the question is of the manner, we must proceed to regeneration and its fruits.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> See *Inst.* 3.11.1 (1539), *OS* 4:182; *True Method* in *Tracts* 3:246-247, *CO* 7:596-597. Cf. Hunsinger, “Two Simultaneities,” 322.

<sup>86</sup> See Hunsinger, “Two Simultaneities,” 321-322.

<sup>87</sup> Lane, “The Role of Scripture,” 382, notes the two reasons (God as the creator of such good works and God as pardoner of imperfect good works) that God pays respect to believers’ works, though I present them in the opposite order that Lane uses. My approach is influenced by Calvin’s image of the wine vessel. God’s creating good qualities within believers is logically requisite to his pardoning their imperfect works, just as an impure vessel is first filled with wine, and then the sullied wine is overlooked by the recipient.

<sup>88</sup> See *Inst.* 3.17.4 (1539), *OS* 4:257.

<sup>89</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.5 (1539), *OS* 4:267.

<sup>90</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.6 (1539), *OS* 4:259.

<sup>91</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.6 (1539), *OS* 4:259.

The second reason God pays respect to works is he has graciously willed to look upon them as if they had real value: “But we must always remember that God ‘accepts’ believers by reason of works only because he is their source and graciously, by way of adding to his liberality, deigns also to show ‘acceptance’ toward the good works he has himself bestowed.”<sup>92</sup> Why? “Because the godly, encompassed with mortal flesh, are still sinners, and their good works are as yet incomplete and redolent of the vices of the flesh, he can be propitious neither to the former nor to the latter unless he embrace them in Christ rather than in themselves.”<sup>93</sup> Calvin also expresses this idea in his comments on Genesis 7:1, wherein he states not only that Noah cultivated righteousness, but also that Noah’s righteousness was a reason for divine blessing:

Should any one object, that from this passage, God is proved to have respect to works in saving men, the solution is ready; that this is not repugnant to gratuitous acceptance, since God accepts those gifts which he himself has conferred upon his servants. We must observe, in the first place, that he loves men freely, inasmuch as he finds nothing in them but what is worthy of hatred, since all men are born the children of wrath, and heirs of eternal malediction. In this respect he adopts them to himself in Christ, and justifies them by his mere mercy. After he has, in this manner, reconciled them unto himself, he also regenerates them, by his Spirit, to new life and righteousness. Hence flow good works, which must of necessity be pleasing to God himself. Thus he not only loves the *faithful*, but also their *works*. We must again observe, that since some fault always adheres to our works, it is not possible that they can be approved, except as a matter of indulgence. The grace, therefore, of Christ, and not their own dignity or merit, is that which gives worth to our works. Nevertheless, we do not deny that [good works] come into the account before God: as he here acknowledges, and accepts, the righteousness of Noah which had proceeded from his own grace; and in this manner (as Augustine speaks) he will crown his own gifts.<sup>94</sup>

We observe first that God takes into account believers’ works in saving them—an aspect of Calvin’s soteriology that we will detail in chapter 4. Second, the notion that God takes into account believers’ good works does not contradict the fact that their salvation is by God’s gratuitous acceptance. Third, God is the one who confers such gifts upon believers, and he cannot but love and accept that which is his. Fourth, God accepts believers’ works because he has already accepted and regenerated their persons. Double acceptance, then, is based upon double justification.<sup>95</sup> The reason believers are accepted on account of their works is that God has first accepted them and their works

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<sup>92</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.5 (1539/1559), *OS* 4:257. Cf. *Inst.* 3.17.3 (1539), *OS* 4:256; Raith, *After Merit*, 141-144; Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 33-39.

<sup>93</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.5 (1539), *OS* 4:257-258.

<sup>94</sup> *Comm.* Gen. 7:1, *CO* 23:128-129.

<sup>95</sup> Lane, “Calvin and Article 5,” 253.



on account of his gratuitous mercy. The secondary basis of acceptance (works), therefore, is not contrary to the primary basis (faith), but rather is subordinated to and contingent upon it.<sup>96</sup>

### 3.4. Justification by Works

Given that Calvin affirms a secondary basis for divine acceptance, we must ask whether he teaches a form of justification by works, as both Coxhead and Lane have suggested.<sup>97</sup> After all, Calvin defines justification *as* acceptance.<sup>98</sup> Yet he repeatedly denies that good works, even of believers, possess justifying power.<sup>99</sup> Only absolute obedience justifies, so it is impossible for justification to be grounded in sanctification, which is imperfect in this life. To claim works hold justifying power would, in Calvin's mind, make God and human co-laborers in justification.<sup>100</sup> Contra those who would ascribe justification partly to God and partly to humans, partly to faith and partly to works, Calvin explains, "Let us not consider works to be so commended after free justification that they afterward *take over* the function of justifying man, or *share* this office with faith."<sup>101</sup> Works, both before and after regeneration, are excluded from justification, which is solely God's act.

And if Calvin were to affirm a form of justification by works, one might expect him to do so in his comments on James 2, where it is said that Abraham was justified by works (v.21) and that believers are justified by works and not by faith alone (v.24). Calvin refutes the idea of unformed and formed faith throughout his comments on James 2:14-25, rejecting the notion that works supplement what is lacking in faith. Calvin upholds the Pauline teaching that all are justified by faith apart from works, yet

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<sup>96</sup> Coxhead, "Works Righteousness," and "Justification by Works," has demonstrated this from Calvin's commentaries and *Institutio*.

<sup>97</sup> See chapter 1 for a summary of Coxhead's and Lane's arguments. Willem van Vlastuin, *Be Renewed: A Theology of Personal Renewal* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 30, also states that Calvin "was prepared to speak of a justification by works." Van Vlastuin does not demonstrate extensively that Calvin held a form of justification by works, and it seems he sometimes has justification *of* works more particularly in mind. Moreover, he points to primary and secondary resources that connect good works to salvation generally and to rewards rather than to justification particularly.

<sup>98</sup> See *Inst.* 3.11.2 (1543), *OS* 4:183; *Serm.* Gen. 15:6 (2:340), *SC* XI/2:760. Cf. Lane, "The Role of Scripture," 382: "Calvin does not say in so many words that believers are 'justified by their works' but 'acceptance by reason of works' can mean nothing else."

<sup>99</sup> See *Inst.* 3.11.14 (1559), *OS* 4:198.

<sup>100</sup> Again, Raith, *After Merit*, is helpful for understanding Calvin's rejection of a partly-partly schema.

<sup>101</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.9 (1539), *OS* 4:262.

he sees no contradiction between Paul and James, both of whom were inspired by the Spirit.<sup>102</sup> According to Calvin, James is concerned primarily with a bare faith that does not produce holiness. True faith, Calvin explains, works through love or produces good works—for one cannot receive justification without sanctification. Thus, a mere intellectual faith—especially the kind that “contains nothing but a belief that there is a God”—does not justify because it is false faith.<sup>103</sup> True faith unites us to God, Calvin explains, and “this comes not in any other way than by being united to the body of Christ, so that, living through his Spirit, we are also governed by him.” Thus, “there is no such thing as this in the dead image of faith.”<sup>104</sup> If faith is disconnected from works, then “it is indeed no faith” and “does not properly retain the name.”<sup>105</sup>

Turning to 2:21—which states that Abraham was justified by works when he offered Isaac—Calvin states that the broader context of the passage shows what James means. Calvin states, “James does not speak here of the cause of justification, or of the manner how men obtain righteousness.” Rather, James is concerned with showing that true faith always produces good works. So when James states that Abraham was justified by works, he is speaking of the *proof* of justification.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, James uses “justify” differently from Paul. This is clear, Calvin explains, when one considers that in Moses’ account Abraham is declared righteous by faith long before he offered Isaac as a sacrifice, which is what James highlights as Abraham’s justifying work.<sup>107</sup> Whereas Paul uses “justify” to mean that we are “counted righteous” before God only by faith, James uses it to demonstrate that those who profess faith must prove its reality by good works.<sup>108</sup> Thus, “justify” has a twofold meaning: “the gratuitous *imputation* of righteousness before the tribunal of God” and “the *manifestation* of righteousness by conduct.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.11 (1539), *OS* 4:264.

<sup>103</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.11 (1539), *OS* 4:265.

<sup>104</sup> *Comm.* Jas. 2:14, *COR* II/XX:277.

<sup>105</sup> *Comm.* Jas. 2:17, *COR* II/XX:277.

<sup>106</sup> *Comm.* Jas. 2:21, *COR* II/XX:280. Cf. *Antidote* in *Tracts* 3:130, *CO* 7:459.

<sup>107</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.12 (1539), *OS* 4:265; *Comm.* Jas. 2:23, *COR* II/XX:281.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Busch, “Glaube und gute Werke,” 42.

<sup>109</sup> *Comm.* Jas. 2:21, *COR* II/XX:280. Cf. *Inst.* 3.17.12 (1539), *OS* 4:266. In Calvin’s remarks on James 2, both in his *Institutio* and commentary, he highlights the *believer’s* activity—that one proves her faith by works. This is distinct from *God’s* act of reckoning the believer as righteous on account of works, which we shall explore below.

Calvin then explains why Rahab also is said to be justified by works: The reason James discusses both a harlot and the preeminent Patriarch is to show that “no one . . . has ever been counted righteous without good works.” For whoever wants to be considered righteous must show by good works that she is. It is in this sense that Rahab, like Abraham, was “justified” by works. Yet Calvin clarifies, stating that the issue in this passage is not “the mode of *obtaining* righteousness.” He further explains that while good works “are *required* for righteousness”—that one does not possess justifying faith unless she has been regenerated and performs good works—works do not take on the role of “*conferring* righteousness,” because they are tainted and “cannot stand before the tribunal of God.”<sup>110</sup>

Calvin’s understanding of justification by works in James, therefore, is similar to that of Melancthon, who understands James’s use of “to justify” not as equivalent to reconciliation but to mean “to be approved.”<sup>111</sup> It is also similar to Luther’s teaching in his 1536 *Disputation Concerning Justification*. While Luther does not mention James therein, he states that “works justify” in that “they show that we have been justified, just as his fruits show that a man is a Christian and believes in Christ.” Works “only reveal faith”<sup>112</sup> and demonstrate “that we have remission of sins and that we have been pronounced righteous by God.”<sup>113</sup> Thus, when Luther speaks of justification by works, he speaks of a “corporal and outward” justification, “which takes place between man and man.”<sup>114</sup> When man “justifies himself,” he simply demonstrates to himself and others that he has been made right with God by faith, rather than make himself right with God. This is conceptually similar to Bucer’s teaching that good works evince reconciliation with God. Even though Bucer includes both imputation and impartation of righteousness in his *Rechtfertigungslehre*, he teaches that “[imparted] righteousness and the good works wrought in us by the Spirit of Christ constitute the visible evidence of that unmerited acceptance of ours in the sight of God.”<sup>115</sup> Thus, considerable unity

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<sup>110</sup> *Comm. Jas.* 2:25, *COR II/XX*:282.

<sup>111</sup> Melancthon, *CTT* 201, *CR* 21:791. Herein, Melancthon explicitly states that believers possess “a righteousness of works which is approved and which pleases God.” This works-righteousness is not perfect law-keeping but the imperfect obedience of believers—which reveals they have been reconciled to God—that God accepts on account of Christ.

<sup>112</sup> *LW* 34:161, *WA* 39/I:92.

<sup>113</sup> *LW* 34:162, *WA* 39/I:93. Cf. *LW* 34:165, *WA* 39/I:96.

<sup>114</sup> *LW* 34:162, *WA* 39/I:93.

<sup>115</sup> *CP* 166, *B.Rom.* 13. Cf. Wright’s remarks in *CP* 159.

exists among Calvin, Luther, Melancthon, and Bucer in their teachings that good works reveal one's righteous status based on Christ's merits alone.

Yet Calvin goes beyond this to also teach that works are not excluded from justification in the Pauline sense, stating that believers are considered or reckoned righteous *by God* on account of their holy living. In *The True Method of Giving Peace and of Reforming the Church*, he states, "Believers, therefore, *are righteous by works*, just because they are righteous without any merit of, or without any respect of works, seeing that the righteousness of works depends on the righteousness of faith."<sup>116</sup> Again, it is vital to understand that, for Calvin, believers' personal righteousness originates from the grace of God, who causes them to live rightly. Moreover, the works-righteousness of believers is subordinated to faith-righteousness because all their good works are performed by faith in Christ, the sole foundation of salvation.<sup>117</sup> Believers' works-righteousness, therefore, does not result from merit. God does not consider believers righteous because they deserve to be pronounced so or because they are in the absolute sense. Rather, he declares them righteous by works because he has already accepted them and their works on account of Christ's righteousness.

A similar affirmation appears in the *Institutio*:

Now there is much less reason why we should be troubled by the title "righteous," which is customarily applied to believers. Of course, I admit that *the righteous are so called from holiness of life*; but since they rather lean to the pursuit of righteousness than actually fulfill righteousness itself, it is meet that this righteousness, such as it is, should yield to the justification of faith, whence it has what it is.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> *True Method* in *Tracts* 3:248, *CO* 7:597. Cf. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 113: "When God's people give themselves to keeping by faith the Law of God they are accounted as just by God, not through any merit or dignity that they thereby acquire but because God sees in their obedience to the Law a reflexion of the image of His own righteousness and thus God 'contents Himself' with it."

<sup>117</sup> See *Inst.* 3.17.10 (1543), *OS* 4:263; *True Method* in *Tracts* 3:246-248, *CO* 7:596-597; *Antidote* in *Tracts* 3:128, *CO* 7:458; *Comm.* Ps. 106:31, *CO* 32:129. Cf. Lillback, *Binding of God*, 188, who suggests that Calvin affirms "a true righteousness of obedience" that is subordinate and not contrary to the righteousness of Christ. Coxhead, "Works Righteousness," and "Justification by Works," also demonstrates that Calvin affirms a works-righteousness that is subordinated to faith-righteousness. Wright, *Calvin's Salvation*, 300, also acknowledges that in some contexts, Calvin describes works-righteousness and faith-righteousness as complementary. Cf. Stadtland, *Rechtfertigung*, 204, who explains that Calvin's *iustificatio operum* stands exclusively under *sola fide* because one's "Werkgerechtigkeit" is not of oneself.

<sup>118</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.10 (1539), *OS* 4:263-264. Cf. Coxhead, "Justification by Works," 11.

Calvin admits that believers are considered righteous by works, or holy living, but only because they *pursue* righteousness—that is, earnestly seek to live in accordance with God’s law—rather than *fulfill* it.<sup>119</sup>

We find even more provocative and illuminating statements in Calvin’s commentaries.<sup>120</sup> Commenting on Romans 4:6, he states that, according to Scripture, “works, and other blessings also, are sometimes stated to be imputed for righteousness.”<sup>121</sup> Calvin has in mind the story of Phinehas, whose good deed was accredited to him for righteousness:

How then is this vengeance which he inflicted imputed to him for righteousness? It was necessary that he should first have been justified by the grace of God, for those who are already clothed with the righteousness of Christ have God favourably disposed not only to them, but also to their works. The spots and blemishes of these works are covered by the purity of Christ, lest they should come into judgment, and being unpolluted by any defilements, are thereby considered righteous. It is quite clear that apart from such forebearances no human work at all can please God. But if the righteousness of faith is the only reason why our works are counted just, how absurd is the argument that righteousness is not by faith alone, because it is attributed to works. My answer to this is the incontrovertible argument that all works would be condemned of unrighteousness, if justification were not by faith alone.<sup>122</sup>

Again, while Calvin affirms a righteousness of works, he teaches that it is subordinated to the righteousness of faith. Further, the only reason works are imputed for righteousness is that God has chosen to cover their imperfections with Christ’s perfect righteousness. And Calvin later declares that “the righteousness of works, therefore, is the effect of the righteousness of faith.” Moreover,

We should consider here the order of causes as well as the dispensation of the grace of God. No declaration about either the righteousness of works or the blessedness which comes from doing them has any effect unless it has been preceded by this true righteousness of faith alone, and unless this righteousness

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<sup>119</sup> See *Comm. Ps. 5:12/13, CO 31:72; Comm. Ps. 19:11, CO 31:204.*

<sup>120</sup> Lane, “The Role of Scripture,” 382, states, “It is in wrestling with the case of Cornelius, about whom Peter states that all who act righteously are acceptable to God, that Calvin makes his most significant concession” regarding justification by worthless works. I agree with Lane that in wrestling with the account of Cornelius Calvin makes a significant concession concerning God’s acceptance of believers on account of their works and thus a form of justification by works. I also agree with Lane’s main point: that Calvin’s concession reflects his meticulous attention to detail in exegesis, to the extent that he is willing to incorporate into his theology scriptural themes that do not easily fit with hallmark Reformation convictions. Indeed, I believe evidence from Calvin’s commentaries reveals that in wrestling with certain Old Testament passages, he makes concessions that are just as, if not more, significant. In those instances, Calvin uses more specific language of justification in direct connection to believers’ works, as will be demonstrated.

<sup>121</sup> *Comm. Rom. 4:6, COR II/XIII:83.*

<sup>122</sup> *Comm. Rom. 4:6, COR II/XIII:84. Cf. Comm. Ps. 106:31, CO 32:128.*

alone fulfills all its functions. It is this, therefore, that must be built up and established, in order that the former may grow and come forth from is as fruit from the tree.<sup>123</sup>

Calvin's mention of multiple *causae* here means he considers works-righteousness, properly understood, a cause for divine blessing. This does not mean, however, that works share equal theological significance with faith, or that works supplement what faith lacks. Rather, Calvin states that there is an *order* to these causes, with faith-righteousness taking priority. Works-righteousness, therefore, does not work *alongside* faith-righteousness, but is *subordinated* to and *contingent* upon it. Believers are called righteous by works *only because* they are righteous by faith. Calvin denies neither that believers possess works-righteousness nor that they are considered righteous on account of holy living (i.e., works are "imputed for righteousness"). According to him, these are scriptural truths that must be affirmed. Yet, as he explains, it is vital to understand *how* these teachings relate to the more dominant message of Scripture—that believers are accepted first and ultimately on account of faith-righteousness, which is a free gift from God.

Calvin also connects divine declaration of righteousness with believers' good works in his Ezekiel 18 lectures.<sup>124</sup> He understands 18:5-9 to teach that "whoever faithfully observes the law is esteemed just [*censeri iustum*] before God."<sup>125</sup> Further, "The substance [of Ezekiel's teaching] is, that others are not deemed just [*censeri iustos*] before God *unless* they are inclined to benevolence, so as to supply necessities of their brethren, and to succor them in their poverty."<sup>126</sup> And toward the end of his comments on the chapter, Calvin states that "God, of his own liberality, acknowledges as just [*agnoscere tanquam iustos*] those who aspire to righteousness" and that "the

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<sup>123</sup> *Comm. Rom. 4:6, COR II/XIII:84.*

<sup>124</sup> Coxhead, "Justification by Works" and "Works Righteousness," draws heavily on Calvin's Ezekiel commentary in arguing that Calvin holds subordinate doctrines of work-righteousness and justification by works. Cf. Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 192, who asserts that Calvin's comments on Ezekiel 18 show that good works are not to be excluded from the discussion of justification.

Calvin's Ezekiel 18 lectures reflect his most mature thinking on good works. His commentary on Ezekiel, which stops at chapter 20 due to his inability to continue lecturing in poor health, was his last work before his death in May 1564. (See Coxhead, "Works Righteousness," 307.) While the content of these lectures does not diverge from his earlier teachings on works, it helps readers see Calvin's teaching more fully.

<sup>125</sup> *Comm. Ezek. 18:5-9, CO 40:426.*

<sup>126</sup> *Comm. Ezek. 18:5-9, CO 40:429.*

faithful are esteemed just [*iustos censerī*] even in their deeds.”<sup>127</sup> When reading Calvin’s comments on the entire chapter, it is clear that he, as Coxhead remarks, does not understand Ezekiel to be speaking of personal justice/righteousness as merely hypothetical, but rather as actual covenant obedience that is accepted by God.<sup>128</sup>

Ezekiel’s teaching, therefore, poses a “difficult question” for the Protestant doctrine of justification.<sup>129</sup> Calvin claims, however, that Ezekiel’s teaching on works-righteousness can be easily reconciled with the dominant scriptural message of faith-righteousness. He first explains why no one *in se* can be deemed righteous according to the law and then why we must look to Christ alone for righteousness. He then states that when believers are regenerated by the Spirit, God “inscribes a law on their hearts and in their inward parts,” and that believers endeavor to fashion themselves according to the law.<sup>130</sup> However, because sin still remains in believers, they can never fulfill the law and attain perfect righteousness.<sup>131</sup> Yet, while “the righteousness of works is mutilated in the sons of God,” it is “acknowledged as perfect, since, by not imputing their sins to them, [God] proves what is his own.” Continuing, Calvin states that believers “may be called observers of the law, and walkers in the commandments of God, and observers of his righteousness” because of God’s “gratuitous imputation.”<sup>132</sup> Thus, believers themselves are considered righteous because their works have been considered righteous by free pardon. Further, Calvin reinforces in his Ezekiel lectures what he teaches in the

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<sup>127</sup> *Comm. Ezek. 18:14-17, CO 40:439*. In the *Institutio*, Calvin occasionally uses *agnosco* in connection to divine acceptance as it relates to justification. E.g., *Inst. 3.14.13* (1539/1536), *OS 4:232*: “The Lord often testifies that he recognizes [*agnoscere*] no righteousness of works except in the perfect observance of his law.” Further, Calvin’s use of *censeo* in his lectures on Ezekiel 18 reflects his understanding of justification as a declarative act in the *Institutio*. E.g., *Inst. 3.11.2* (1539), *OS 4:182*: “He is said to be justified in God’s sight who is both reckoned righteous [*censetur iustus*] in God’s judgment and has been accepted on account of his righteousness”; *Inst. 3.11.11* (1559), *OS 4:193*: “First, I conclude that they are accounted righteous [*iustos censerī*] who are reconciled to God.” Cf. *Inst. 3.11.3* (1543), *OS 4:184*; *Inst. 3.11.6* (1559), *OS 4:187*.

<sup>128</sup> Coxhead, “Works Righteousness,” 310. Coxhead also explains that Calvin’s Ezekiel 18 commentary reveals that his understanding of righteousness was not limited to the approach represented by the hermeneutics of despair (309-310). While this is true, Calvin’s *corpus* shows that when he speaks of personal righteousness, he typically qualifies his teaching by stating that believers must always look to God’s mercy and Christ’s perfect righteousness. While Calvin does not always explicitly employ the hermeneutic of despair when discussing believers’ personal righteousness, he nevertheless states that believers cannot look to their own righteousness as the ultimate basis for divine acceptance. Thus, even Calvin’s positive statements on personal righteousness are built upon a hermeneutic of despair.

<sup>129</sup> *Comm. Ezek. 18:14-17, CO 40:437*.

<sup>130</sup> *Comm. Ezek. 18:14-17, CO 40:438*.

<sup>131</sup> See *Comm. Ezek. 18:14-17, CO 40:438*.

<sup>132</sup> *Comm. Ezek. 18:14-17, CO 40:438*.

*Institutio*: that God reckons as just those who *pursue* righteousness. Thus, Calvin emphasizes not one's ability to fulfill the law, but one's earnest aspiration to live in a manner pleasing to God.<sup>133</sup> As Coxhead explains, "Calvin understands that the kind of obedience that Ezekiel has in mind . . . is one that consists of faithfulness and sincerity in serving God rather than the perfect keeping of the law *per se*."<sup>134</sup> Therefore, Calvin teaches not only that believers *are just*, in a relative sense, because they have withdrawn from iniquity and pursue justice, but also that they *are deemed just* for the same reasons. It is clear throughout Calvin's *corpus* that to be justified is to be reckoned or considered righteous, not to be made righteous, and here we find him explicating that the faithful are deemed righteous on account of their uprightness.

As in the *Institutio*, however, Calvin qualifies his teaching by stating that believers' good deeds and holy desires are not the principal cause of their salvation. The ultimate reason God esteems believers as righteous on account of their works is his gratuitous mercy. When considering why the faithful are said to be esteemed righteous by works, Calvin explains that God cannot but accept that which is his. He is the one who creates within believers the desire to live according to his precepts and therefore "proves what is his own." Thus, Calvin's positive formulation of justification by works is subordinated to his doctrine of justification *sola fide*.<sup>135</sup> One is considered righteous on account of her works because God has justified her works. And God has justified her works because he has justified her person freely on account of Christ's perfect righteousness, not merit.

We find further evidence for a positive formulation of justification by works in Calvin's Genesis commentary.<sup>136</sup> Commenting on 6:9, wherein Noah is commended for his personal righteousness, Calvin applies the story of Noah to Christians:

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<sup>133</sup> Cf. *Comm.* 1 John 3:5, *COR II/XX*:188-189.

<sup>134</sup> Coxhead, "Works Righteousness," 308.

<sup>135</sup> Coxhead, "Works Righteousness," 307, states that, for Calvin, "Ezekiel's doctrine of justification by works presupposes the gratuitous mercy of God in Christ."

<sup>136</sup> Aside from Coxhead's treatment of Calvin's remarks on Noah ("Justification by Works," 12), the only other commentator I have found who has detected a form of justification by works in Calvin's Genesis commentary is Steven Wedgworth, "John Calvin's Subordinate Order of Justification," *The Calvinist International*, 2 November 2017, <https://calvinistinternational.com/2017/11/02/john-calvin-subordinate-order-justification/>, accessed 2 November 2017. Wedgworth engages Calvin to speak to contemporary discussions regarding a "final justification" in the Reformed tradition. While Wedgworth's post is insightful, it does not engage extensively with Calvin himself or secondary literature. While Wedgworth cites multiple sources and passages from Calvin's *corpus* that are also analyzed in this chapter, his interpretive remarks are cursory. Further, Wedgworth uses the term "double justification" in a way that diverges from its typical use in Calvin scholarship.



If, however, we desire to be approved by God, and accounted righteous before him [*Deo probari, et iusti coram ipso censerī*], we must not only regulate our hands, and eyes, and feet, in obedience to his Law; but integrity of heart is above all things required, and holds the chief place in the true definition of righteousness. Let us, however, know that they are called just and upright [*iustos vocari, et integros*], not who are in every respect perfect, and in whom there is no defect; but who cultivate righteousness purely, and from their heart.<sup>137</sup>

As in his Ezekiel lectures, Calvin here teaches that believers are accounted righteous by God on account of their good works—and, more particularly, the integrity of their heart. Calvin even states that the “true definition of righteousness” is not necessarily in regulating our actions in accord with God’s law but in seeking sincerely to do his will. Thus, while believers can never fulfill the law outwardly—or even in their thoughts, ambitions, and desires—they nevertheless are declared righteous on account of their sincerity.<sup>138</sup> The reason God considers us righteous on account of our holy living and purity of heart, even though we are not totally righteous at the experiential level, is that “God does not act towards his own people with the rigour of justice, as requiring of them a life according to the perfect rule of the Law.”<sup>139</sup> What allows Calvin to affirm a form of justification by works is his understanding that God’s disposition toward believers is different from his disposition toward unbelievers. Toward unbelievers, God acts as a strict Judge and demands perfect uprightness if they are to be justified by works. But to those in Christ, he acts as a gracious and loving Father who does not require perfect justice in order for his children to be pleasing to him.<sup>140</sup>

As elsewhere, Calvin qualifies his teaching, acknowledging that Noah’s personal righteousness, and that of believers, originates from God’s mercy, not merit.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, Noah was adjudged righteous when compared to the wicked around him, or “in contrast with the whole world.”<sup>142</sup> This is different from saying that believers are deemed righteous *coram Deo* because they are righteous *coram hominibus*, for believers

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<sup>137</sup> *Comm. Gen. 6:9, CO 23:119-120.*

<sup>138</sup> *Comm. Gen. 6:9, CO 23:120*: “for, if only no hypocrisy reigns within them, but the pure love of rectitude flourishes, and fills their hearts, he pronounces them, according to his clemency, to be righteous.”

<sup>139</sup> *Comm. Gen. 6:9, CO 23:120.*

<sup>140</sup> One may wonder whether Calvin thus presents God as partial, double-minded, and potentially unjust. Yet, for Calvin, because believers are united to Christ, who has fulfilled the law on their behalf, God does not look upon believers with strict justice. Thus, any imperfections in their works are covered by Christ’s perfect righteousness. This is what enables God to look upon believers and their works with delight.

<sup>141</sup> *Comm. Gen. 6:8, CO 23:119.*

<sup>142</sup> *Comm. Gen. 7:1, CO 23:128.*

may not be considered upright in the eyes of non-believers. Rather, Calvin seems to be suggesting that believers are considered righteous in contrast to non-believers because they, unlike non-believers, are animated by the Spirit and thus live relatively righteous lives. There is a qualitative difference between the two groups.

Perhaps Calvin's clearest concession of justification by works comes in his comments on why Abram, in Genesis 15:6, is declared righteous after having lived uprightly for so many years. This passage, Calvin explains, does not state when Abram first began to be justified, but that Abram, since the time God had first called him, always relied on God in faith. So while Abram indeed cultivated "angelical uprightness," he did not do so without "fleeing to faith." According to Calvin, this passage teaches that "the righteousness of works is not to be *substituted* for the righteousness of faith, in any such way, that one should *perfect* what the other has begun; but that holy men are only justified by faith, as long as they live in the world."<sup>143</sup> This means believers, like Abram, are justified freely by faith all throughout their lives, even after they have made moral progress. Yet Calvin afterward identifies two methods of justification:

After the faithful are born again by the Spirit of God, the method of justifying differs, in some respect, from the former. For God reconciles to himself those who are born only of the flesh, and who are destitute of all good; and since he finds nothing in them except a dreadful mass of evils, he counts them just, by imputation. But those whom he has imparted the Spirit of holiness and righteousness, he embraces with his gifts.<sup>144</sup>

Calvin openly states that two distinct methods of justification exist. Elsewhere, he states that believers are *accepted* or *esteemed* righteous on account of their works. Certainly, Calvin considers justification to be the acceptance whereby God declares or acknowledges believers as righteous. Thus, instances wherein he says believers are deemed righteous or accepted on account of their works are ways for him to acknowledge a form of justification by works. What is significant here, though, is that

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<sup>143</sup> *Comm. Gen. 15:6, CO 23:213.* One may wonder whether Calvin exaggerates Abraham's growth in personal righteousness by calling it "angelic uprightness." While Abraham certainly displayed remarkable devotion after God had declared him righteous, he occasionally displayed grave misconduct—conceiving a child with Hagar (Gen. 16) and lying to Abimelech about Sarah's true identity (Gen. 20)—which seem far from "angelic." Perhaps Calvin has in mind the trajectory of Abraham's life, believing that Abraham had reached a near-angelic state toward the end of his life.

<sup>144</sup> *Comm. Gen. 15:6, CO 23:214.*

he does not simply state that God “embraces [*complectitur*]”<sup>145</sup> believers, but also uses the term *iustifico* in connection to believers’ good works. Calvin also asserts that the method of justification after regeneration differs somewhat from that which precedes regeneration. Before regeneration, God justifies sinners apart from works by means of imputation, since no good is found in them. Afterward, however, he does not justify believers apart from works, but embraces them with the gifts he has conferred upon them; he accepts them as righteous on account of their Spirit-wrought works.<sup>146</sup> Further, these works are always imperfect and need to be “justified by gratuitous imputation” if they are to be acknowledged in the justifying that occurs after regeneration.<sup>147</sup> Calvin’s positive formulation of justification by works, therefore, is grounded in his understanding of double justification.

Calvin further explains that the secondary method of justification (by works) is subordinated to and contingent upon the first (by faith). He writes, “The righteousness even of the most perfect characters perpetually consists in faith; since Abram, with all the excellency of his virtues, after his daily and even remarkable service of God, was, nevertheless, justified by faith.”<sup>148</sup> The works taken into account when God reckons believers righteous are done *in* faith, not *in addition to* faith, as if faith did only part of the justifying.<sup>149</sup> Justification is not sometimes by faith and sometimes by works. No, Calvin teaches that faith always justifies and yet that good works done in faith following regeneration are taken into consideration when God continually (not progressively)

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<sup>145</sup> For instances in the *Institutio* wherein Calvin uses *complector* in describing justification, see *Inst.* 3.11.16 (1539), *OS* 4:200; *Inst.* 3.14.12 (1539), *OS* 4:231; *Inst.* 3.17.3 (1539), *OS* 4:256.

<sup>146</sup> Commenting on *Inst.* 3.17.4-5, Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 135, affirms what we find in Calvin’s comments on Gen. 15:6: “We must distinguish justification granted to man in his estrangement from God and the justification which the believer needs during his lifetime. Hence there is a justification that pays no regard to the works of man and a justification in regard to which works are considered as the fruits of faith.” Cf. Paul Chung, *Spirituality and Social Ethics in John Calvin: A Pneumatological Perspective* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000), 58, who comments on the same sections: “We need to distinguish justification granted to humans in their estrangement from God and the justification which the believer needs during his or her lifetime. Hence there is a justification which pays no regard to the world of humans and a justification in regard to which works are considered as the fruits of faith.”

<sup>147</sup> *Comm.* Gen 15:6, *CO* 23:214.

<sup>148</sup> *Comm.* Gen. 15:6, *CO* 23:214.

<sup>149</sup> E.g., *Inst.* 3.17.8 (1539), *OS* 4:261, wherein Calvin states after referring to Phinehas’ righteous deed (Ps. 106:30-31) that justification is without help from works.

justifies the believer.<sup>150</sup> Still, even though Calvin identifies two distinct *methods* of justification, he asserts that there is only one *cause*—God alone is the principle agent who justifies believers.<sup>151</sup> Faith itself does not justify, and neither do works. Rather, before regeneration, God justifies by imputing Christ’s righteousness to believers; and after regeneration, he justifies also by graciously accepting the righteousness he has imparted to them by the Spirit.

Calvin provides a similar teaching in a sermon on the same passage. From Tuesday, March 5, to Friday, March 8, 1560, Calvin delivered four sermons on justification, with Genesis 15:6 being his primary text. In the first sermon, he discusses the meaning of faith and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. In his conclusion, Calvin states that since “Abraham was justified by believing in God” and because “our works can do nothing to cause God to approve of us and establish the hope that we are to have for eternal salvation,” we must ascribe all glory to God and “not presume to bring him anything from ourselves.” Calvin calls this “our ABCs,” the most basic understanding of justification, or the “foundations of our faith.”<sup>152</sup> Building upon sermon one, sermon two expounds further the meaning of justification and how we are accepted by God. Calvin states in his conclusion, “We find in the person of the Son of God everything we need to make us acceptable because our sins are not imputed to us.” He then states, “What we have to do now is *move beyond that* and talk about how God, having thus received us in mercy once, continues to keep us and consider us righteous all the time of our lives and even in death, for that is the principal goal we must reach.”<sup>153</sup> In Calvin’s mind, there is an aspect of justification that is beyond, though not contradictory to, the “ABCs.” And while not stating so explicitly, he implies that the manner in which God accepts believers after he has initially received them is distinct from the way in which he first received them. Calvin expounds this in sermon three, wherein he presents his concepts of double justification and double acceptance, and even a form of justification by works. In the fourth sermon, Calvin further explains why our works cannot merit salvation, though they are nevertheless integral to the Christian life.

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<sup>150</sup> Cf. *Inst.* 3.17.8 (1539), *OS* 4:261: “it is one thing to discuss what value works have of themselves, another, to weigh in what place they are to be held after faith righteousness has been established.”

<sup>151</sup> See *Inst.* 3.11.7 (1559), *OS* 4:188.

<sup>152</sup> *Serm.* Gen. 15:6 (2:323), *SC* XI/2:749.

<sup>153</sup> *Serm.* Gen. 15:6 (2:346), *SC* XI/2:763.

Let us now look at details of Calvin's third sermon. After summarizing sermons one and two, Calvin explains that we must always look to God's free pardon, even when we who are regenerated have progressed in the Christian life, because the virtues God has placed within us are always tainted by our sin. Calvin asserts, "Now we see clearly that that righteousness [i.e., justification] is not just for a day, but that it must continue throughout our lives. For although we have profited from God's service, imperfections still remain. So faith and only faith must justify us."<sup>154</sup> As in the *Institutio*, Calvin teaches that justification is a continuous, though not progressive, act.<sup>155</sup> God's not-guilty-but-righteous declaration over the sinner covers the entirety of her life.

Calvin then discusses the issue he mentioned briefly in the closing of sermon two: how believers are considered righteous once they have been initially received into God's favor. He acknowledges that the believer is different from before he was justified, because God has not only accepted him as righteous in Christ but also made him anew by the Spirit.<sup>156</sup> Further,

Now a man of faith will at least have a healthy desire to live in obedience to God; he will be displeased with his vices and will indeed grieve over them, and his principal desire will always be to live in conformity with the law [i.e., pursue righteousness]. So when a man of faith is doing that, *it must not be said that he is justified as he was from the outset*, because he was corrupt at the time and completely alienated from God. . . . When God justifies us at the beginning, that is, when he receives us in mercy, removing us from the condemnation in which we were, he employs a general pardon. And then when he justifies us afterward, it is not that he does not recognize the good things he placed within us and that he does not acknowledge and approve them, for he cannot deny himself. And since he governs us by his Holy Spirit, even though sin dwells within us, it nevertheless does not reign in us (cf. Rom. 6:12), as we read in the sixth chapter of Romans, even though we do not do the good that we desire (cf. Rom. 7:18), we still try to. Therefore, God approves that because it is from him, but let us note that he justifies us in our persons and even justifies us in our works by pure faith.<sup>157</sup>

As in his Genesis commentary, Calvin uses overt justification language and stresses that believers *are not* justified in the same way after regeneration as they were "at the beginning." The reason "justification is a little different" after regeneration is that the

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<sup>154</sup> *Serm. Gen. 15:6* (2:358), *SC XI/2:771*. That Calvin frequently refers to justification as righteousness was discussed in "2.3. Redeemed Humanity."

<sup>155</sup> See *Inst. 3.14.10* (1536), *OS 4:229*; *Inst. 3.14.11* (1543), *OS 4:230*; *Inst. 4.1.21* (mainly 1539), *OS 5:24-25*; *Comm. 1 John 1:7*, *COR II/XX:147-148*. Cf. Alan C. Clifford, "Justification: The Calvin-Saumur Perspective," *EQ* 79.4 (2007): 337-338; Wright, *Calvin's Salvation*, 75,217. Luther seems to also teach that justification is continuous rather than a singular event in his *Disputation Concerning Justification* (*LW* 34:164,191, *WA* 39/I:94-95,122).

<sup>156</sup> See *Serm. Gen. 15:6* (2:359), *SC XI/2:771-772*.

<sup>157</sup> *Serm. Gen. 15:6* (2:359-360), *SC XI/2:771-772*.

man of faith is different from who he was when God called him “at the beginning of the gospel.”<sup>158</sup> Calvin describes justification at the beginning as a general pardon, because no good resides in us. But the secondary manner by which God justifies is *not* without consideration of works done in faith, because good *does* reside in believers by the power of God’s Spirit. As in the other passages we have considered, Calvin’s teaching on justification by works here is resolutely monergistic: “It is God’s own responsibility to justify us.”<sup>159</sup> This does not mean, however, that believers are passive. Indeed, the Spirit-wrought good works that believers perform are taken into consideration when God justifies them after regeneration.<sup>160</sup> Yet as he explicates in his commentary on the same passage, Calvin indicates that justification by works is grounded in double justification because believers’ works are tainted and thus do not merit acceptance. Moreover, “God always justifies his own freely, that is, he considers them acceptable, not because of virtues which are in them, for there are none, or because of those which he has placed in them, for they are to be condemned because of weakness that is in them, but because he justifies those whom he has chosen, as Paul says in the eighth chapter of Romans (cf. Rom. 8:30).”<sup>161</sup> While it seems Calvin here is retracting his previous statements, that God justifies believers by embracing his own gifts within them, he is teaching that the principal reason for divine acceptance/justification—both at the “beginning” and “afterward”—is God’s mercy. Yet this does not prevent Calvin from suggesting that justification after regeneration is on account of works. When God initially declares a person righteous, he does so on account of his faith in Christ, since no good resides in him. Yet once he is regenerated by the Spirit, God declares him righteous on account of his works. Again, this does not mean that works are *substituted* for faith, but rather that good works are done “by pure faith.” It is imperative to remember, however, that true faith recognizes that one does not bring anything to God *from himself*, as if he merited God’s acceptance, and that all his strength comes *from God alone*. Therefore, when Calvin describes works after regeneration as a basis for justification, he does not place them on equal footing with faith or suggest that they

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<sup>158</sup> *Serm. Gen. 15:6* (2:360-361), *SC XI/2:772*.

<sup>159</sup> *Serm. Gen. 15:6* (2:365), *SC XI/2:775*.

<sup>160</sup> This discredits Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 242, who claims that justification and sanctification lack “inherent connection.” According to Wright, love is what unites justification and sanctification (250). Wright contradicts himself, given that he sees justification as the cause of sanctification. If justification frees our hearts to love God and neighbor (250), and if sanctification is “*exterior* works of love” (249), then justification and sanctification seem to have some inherent connection.

<sup>161</sup> *Serm. Gen. 15:6* (2:360-361), *SC XI/2:772*.

*share* justifying power with faith. For Calvin, works-righteousness is always subordinated to and contingent upon faith-righteousness.

### 3.5. Conclusion

Calvin readily affirms that believers possess a works-righteousness and that God accepts believers on account of their works. He even teaches a form of justification by works that is subordinated to and contingent upon justification *sola fide*. In the next chapter, we will consider the soteriological value that Calvin ascribes to righteous works. For him, works not only show believers to be righteous and thus acceptable to God, but also play an integral role in their salvation. But here we have demonstrated both why believers' works are called righteous and why believers themselves are considered righteous on account of their works.

Integral to Calvin's teaching on believers' good works is his understanding of divine-human causality. Our analysis confirms what Raith has argued: while Calvin rejects the notion that God and humans share responsibility in salvation, he nevertheless affirms that both God and believers act simultaneously in the cultivation of righteousness. Calvin sees God as the primary agent and the believer as the secondary agent. The two do not operate on the same causal level in partnership, as if each did his respective part, but work concurrently on different causal levels.<sup>162</sup> As Raith explains, "Calvin fully incorporates the human actor in the production of every good work. His participatory framework for divine-human causality enables him to emphasize the divine grace for good works without negating the human actor as a real causal principle in the act."<sup>163</sup> Calvin himself states, "Those good works which he has bestowed upon us the Lord calls 'ours,' and testifies they not only are acceptable to him but also will have their reward." Further, "Whatever is praiseworthy in works is God's grace; there is not a drop that we ought *by rights* to ascribe *to ourselves*."<sup>164</sup> He then asserts that all credit must be given solely to God; it cannot be divided between God and us. To us, Calvin teaches, we assign only the pollution of the good work created in us by God. "For, as we have by nature been created, oil will sooner be pressed from a stone than any good work from us."<sup>165</sup> In ourselves, we can never produce good works. Only connected to Christ, who regenerates and animates us by his Spirit, can we perform righteousness. This

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<sup>162</sup> Raith, *After Merit*, 69-74, 111-115.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>164</sup> *Inst.* 3.15.3 (1539), *OS* 4:241.

<sup>165</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.5 (1539), *OS* 4:224.

reflects what we read in Calvin's account of prelapsarian humanity, who were able to obey God only when connected to him. Even *pre lapsum*, humans could never live rightly apart from God. Calvin seems to uphold a similar notion in his account of the Christian life. When considering the whole of Calvin's teaching in the *Institutio*, and material from other works, it seems he wants readers to understand that just as original humans were to refer all their gifts to God's grace, so believers are to refer their personal righteousness ultimately to God.<sup>166</sup> While believers are indeed active agents in cultivating righteousness, God is the origin of such righteousness and the one who moves them to live according to his law. This is captured poignantly in Calvin's question, "Who of us can boast that he has appealed to God by his own righteousness when our first capacity for well-doing flows from regeneration?"<sup>167</sup>

While Calvin teaches that regenerate humans can perform righteous deeds, he believes that even their best works are tainted by sin. For their works to be acceptable as wholly righteous, then, God must pardon them. Because God accounts believers' imperfect good works as perfectly righteous in Christ, their works are considered righteousness. Works-righteousness, therefore, is not simply hypothetical for Calvin, because his understanding of righteousness is not limited to *absolute* righteousness; he also teaches a *partial* or *relative* righteousness as covenant obedience, as Coxhead has argued. Calvin even asserts that God takes into account this righteousness when he justifies or embraces the believer after initially receiving her into his favor. Our study, therefore, confirms what Coxhead and Lane have argued: Calvin teaches a form of justification by works. Yet, as Calvin elucidates, the believer's works-righteousness is contingent upon and subordinated to faith-righteousness. Further, the believer's personal righteousness is subordinated to Christ's imputed righteousness because one's sanctification is imperfect and thus can never be the ultimate grounding for one's right standing *coram Deo*. This, however, does not prevent Calvin from teaching that good works are a subordinate basis for acceptance/justification. Scripture teaches that God accepts believers on account of their righteous deeds because he has graciously willed to, Calvin argues.

Therefore, what is perhaps most significant in Calvin's attempt to harmonize the seemingly conflicting theological principles of works-righteousness and faith-righteousness is he wants believers to understand that God acts toward them as a loving

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<sup>166</sup> See *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:3, *COR* II/XX:326.

<sup>167</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.5 (1539), *OS* 4:224.



and indulgent Father, not a strict Judge.<sup>168</sup> Calvin mentions this relational change in *Institutio* 3.11.1, and it is clear that he has it in mind as he explains—in his *Institutio* and elsewhere—why God accepts both believers’ imperfect good works and believers themselves on account of their works. While believers can pursue and perform the spiritual good because they have been regenerated, the ultimate reason they and their works are approved by God is his gratuitous mercy. God no longer sees believers as alienated from himself, destitute of the adventitious gifts of righteousness and holiness. Rather, believers are united to Christ and indwelt with the Spirit, who cultivates virtues within them. Consequently, God sees his own countenance in his children and no longer demands perfection from them. This does not mean, however, that God’s standard of righteousness has actually changed, as if he calls evil good or imperfect perfect. Rather, because believers are in Christ, covered with his perfect righteousness, the partial righteousness of believers is acceptable to God as if it were perfect. Thus, the ultimate reason God accepts both believers and their works is that he has willed to do so of his own liberality. This aspect of Calvin’s teaching on the Christian life cannot be overlooked, and it is one we will return to in the next chapter as we explore the soteriological value of good works.

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<sup>168</sup> Raith, *After Merit*, 146, rightly states the same concerning Calvin’s theology of rewards, which we will explore in the next chapter. Cf. Lane, “The Role of Scripture,” 375.

## Chapter 4

# The Soteriological Value of Good Works

Having analyzed Calvin's teaching on the relation between good works and divine acceptance, we will now explore his understanding of the soteriological value of good works. By "soteriological value," I mean the value that God ascribes to works so they may be useful in the lives of believers. It is vital to reiterate that, for Calvin, before one is united to Christ, works are worthless *coram Deo*. They do not render one acceptable to God and cannot make one righteous experientially. Moreover, before union with Christ, the sinner is incapable of performing any spiritually good work. Yet once the sinner is united to Christ by Spirit-created faith, good works, which are the gift of God, are given some value, though that value comes from Christ's work and not the believer: "After forgiveness of sins is set forth, the good works that now follow are appraised otherwise than on their own merit. For everything imperfect in them is covered by Christ's perfection, every blemish or spot is cleansed away by his purity in order not to be brought in question at the divine judgment."<sup>1</sup> The value of good works is not inherent, but comes from God, who graciously pardons and accepts them on account of Christ's merit. Thus the value ascribed to believers' works does not correspond to the inherent worth of works. Still, this does not prevent Calvin from teaching that God has freely willed to use works positively in the lives of the faithful so they may know that they are accepted as righteous by him, may know that they will be accepted by him in the eschaton, may become more like him, and may enjoy his blessings and deeper fellowship with him. In this chapter, therefore, we will discuss the role good works play in the Christian life as regards: (1) growth in holiness; (2) communion with God; (3) assurance of faith; (4) rewards; and (5) eschatological salvation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.8 (1539), *OS* 4:261. Cf. *Inst.* 3.17.3 (1539), *OS* 4:256, wherein Calvin states that works after justification are attributed "some value."

<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I use "good works" in a broad sense, which Calvin himself does. This will be detailed in chapter 5. For our purposes here, it is sufficient to remark that Calvin often equates good works with holy or righteous living (see "4.3. Good Works and Assurance" below). Thus, multiple sections in this chapter focus narrowly on holiness rather than on "good works" *per se*. Moreover, the limitations of space in this chapter prevent me from providing extensive treatments of these five themes in Calvin's thought. We are presently interested in these topics to the extent that they reveal the usefulness Calvin ascribes to good works in the Christian life.

## 4.1. Good Works and Growth in Holiness

In chapter 2, we discovered that the *imago Dei* is restored increasingly in believers as a result of Christ's saving work. More specifically, believers are conformed to Christ's image. According to Calvin, our restoration is both situational and experiential. The faithful not only enjoy renewed relationship with God but also have their nature healed in Christ, who restores to them the adventitious gifts forfeited at the fall. Moreover, just as the gifts at creation were able to be developed, thus enabling humans to become more God-like, so the gifts restored by Christ are able to develop, enabling believers to become increasingly God-like. The gifts of "faith, love of God, charity toward neighbor, zeal for holiness and for righteousness"<sup>3</sup> do not remain static, but increase within believers, making them more like God—which is the *Evangelii finis*.<sup>4</sup> That the supernatural gifts develop in the redeemed is evident, for example, in Calvin's assertions that faith gradually increases in believers.<sup>5</sup> As believers pursue God and his righteousness, their faith in him increases, and so does their love for and resemblance of him. For Calvin, that this is the work of God's Spirit is incontrovertible. Yet Calvin comfortably assigns believers an active role in sanctification, whereby they grow increasingly holy—though they limp forward in this life and make little progress, yet progress nonetheless.<sup>6</sup> Believers' ability to pursue and perform righteousness, therefore, is inextricably linked to their own experiential *renovatio*.<sup>7</sup> Or as Billings aptly observes, Calvin's theology of sanctification "speaks in terms of the impartation and infusion of the Spirit, such that the human and her capacities are used through the Spirit."<sup>8</sup> It seems

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<sup>3</sup> *Inst.* 2.2.12 (1559), *OS* 3:255.

<sup>4</sup> *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:4, *COR II/XX*:328. Cf. "2.3 Humanity in Christ."

<sup>5</sup> E.g., *Inst.* 3.2.33 (1559), *OS* 4:44; *Inst.* 4.14.8-9 (mainly 1536, 1539), *OS* 5:265-267; *Inst.* 4.14.11 (1539), *OS* 5:268. Cf. Billings, *Calvin*, 108; Stuermann, *A Critical Study of Calvin's Concept of Faith*, 112-116.

<sup>6</sup> See *Inst.* 3.6.5 (1539), *OS* 4:150. As discussed in "2.3. Humanity in Christ," believers cannot attain perfection in this life.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 111, who argues that good works are "indispensable to the ongoing restoration of the divine image in believers."

<sup>8</sup> Billings, *Calvin*, 16. Cf. 156, wherein Billings states that the Spirit enables "voluntary obedience to the law, because voluntary obedience must always be connected with a communion with God which both restores the primal human nature and enables humanity to 'participate in God' through Christ." While Billings does not argue that our obedience itself restores human nature, he sees obedience as integral to such restoration because it is inextricably connected to the primary reason for our experiential restoration: communion with God. Cf. 164-165, wherein he argues that obedience to the first table of the law leads to obedience to the second table. Consequently, "The act of cheerfully loving one's neighbour is an act that restores the image of God in believers, as they partake of Christ in acts of love" (165). While Calvin does not state explicitly that neighborly love restores God's image in us, it is clear from *Inst.*

few scholars deny that believers play an active role in their own renovation, yet some emphasize the primacy of God's activity so much that believers' activity is unaccounted for in Calvin's thought. Partee, for example, states that "Calvin insisted on eschewing entirely a human role in salvation."<sup>9</sup> Granted, Partee states this when discussing Calvin's doctrine of predestination, yet his use of *salvation* is vague. And while he rightly emphasizes the primacy of God's activity, he misrepresents Calvin, who highlights human agency in his teaching on the Christian life, though never in a way that detracts from or competes with God's activity and glory, as we shall see throughout this chapter.

As Calvin expounds sanctification in *Institutio* book 3, he ascribes an active role to believers in cultivating experiential righteousness, or growing in personal holiness, with good works being a necessary means to that end. To understand this rightly, we must remember that, for Calvin, one's sanctification is a continual conversion toward God that consists in mortification/vivification. While mortification and vivification do not have a human origin but are fruits of the Spirit's work, they do not occur apart from the believer's activity. Calvin writes,

The first step toward obeying his law is to deny our own nature. Afterward, they designate the renewal by the fruits that follow from it—namely, righteousness, judgment, and mercy. It would not be enough duly to discharge such duties unless the mind itself and the heart first put on the inclination to righteousness, judgment, and mercy. That comes to pass when the Spirit of God so imbues our souls, steeped in his holiness, with both new thoughts and feelings, that they can be rightly considered new. Surely, as we are naturally turned away from God, *unless self-denial precedes*, we shall never approach that which is right. Therefore, we are very often enjoined to put off the old man, to renounce the world and the flesh, to bid our evil desires farewell, to be renewed in the spirit of our mind.<sup>10</sup>

It is the Spirit who gives us a new heart and mind, causing us to renounce evil and desire righteousness. Yet while Calvin emphasizes the primacy of the Spirit's activity in

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2.2.12 (1559), *OS* 3:255 that the adventitious gift of "charity toward neighbor" is restored in Christ, and from 3.6.1 (1559), *OS* 4:146 that the law contains "that newness by which [God's] image can be restored in us." Further, as will be shown below, Calvin believes that the fruits of regeneration—which include love—also function as means whereby believers are increasingly sanctified. Thus, Billings is pertinent for our discussion as he demonstrates that, for Calvin, believers' Spirit-enabled activity is inextricably connected to their own renovation. Cf. Wright, *Calvin's Salvation*, 166, who, commenting on *Inst.* 3.11.1, astutely remarks that Calvin "makes salvation sound like a project of one's own establishing ('stabiliendae')," thus highlighting Calvin's emphasis on human activity.

<sup>9</sup> Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 250. Cf. Miles, "Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body," 305, who states that, for Calvin, there is nothing for the believer to do or be, and the believer suddenly "appears in [her] true form as the glory of God."

<sup>10</sup> *Inst.* 3.3.8 (1539,1559), *OS* 4:62.

renewing us, he also underscores our role in the process. Recalling what we discovered in chapters 2-3, we remember that those works that the Spirit creates in us may also be called ours, because we perform them voluntarily from a renewed heart. Believers, therefore, are real casual agents in renouncing their sinful desires, which consequently leads to newness of life.

This becomes increasingly clear in *Institutio* 3.7, titled “The Sum of the Christian Life: The Denial of Ourselves.”<sup>11</sup> Herein, Calvin repeatedly emphasizes the believer’s role in self-denial, an integral aspect of mortification. Commenting on Romans 12:1-2, Calvin explains that the main point of the passage is that we are not our own but are “consecrated and dedicated to God” and that all our thoughts, words, plans, and actions should be directed toward his glory.<sup>12</sup> To this end, “let *us* therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the flesh,” and, “let *us* therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours.” Put another way, the “first step” to living and dying to God is “that a man depart from himself in order that he may apply the whole force of his ability in the service of the Lord.”<sup>13</sup> For Calvin, therefore, the renewal of our mind occurs only when *we*, by the Spirit’s power, deny our sinful inclinations, repudiate the patterns of this world, and serve God.

Further, when describing repentance—which for Calvin is synonymous with sanctification—Calvin identifies in 2 Corinthians 7 seven qualities that are both causes and effects of one’s *renovatio*: “The apostle enumerates seven causes, effects, or parts of his description of repentance. They are earnestness or carefulness, excuse, indignation, fear, longing, zeal, and avenging [II Cor. 7:11]. It should not seem absurd that I dare not to determine whether they ought to be accounted causes or effects, for either is debatable. And they can also be called inclinations joined with repentance.”<sup>14</sup> Calvin, as he openly declares, is not concerned with classifying these characteristics as either causes or effects of renovation because he sees them not only as the fruit or signs of regeneration but also as means by which believers are increasingly sanctified.

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<sup>11</sup> Commenting on Calvin’s larger discussion of the Christian life—which was added in the 1539 *Institutio* and essentially retained throughout subsequent editions—of which 3.7 is a part, Wendel, *Calvin*, 246, explains that the Reformer included this larger text “to show how the Christian can derive from the Scriptures a rule of conduct for his daily behaviour and his advancement on the path of holiness.”

<sup>12</sup> *Inst.* 3.7.1 (1539), *OS* 4:151. Cf. *Comm.* Rom. 12:1-2. See especially Calvin’s comments on 12:2, *COR* II/XII:257, wherein he expounds “the renewal which is demanded of *us*.”

<sup>13</sup> *Inst.* 3.7.1 (1539), *OS* 4:151.

<sup>14</sup> *Inst.* 3.3.15 (1543), *OS* 4:71. Cf. *Comm.* 2 Cor. 7:11, *CO* 50:90.

Carefulness, for example, both arises from godly sorrow and leads to mortification of sin since it leads one to guard against the snares of sin. Thus, carefulness stems from regeneration and leads to ongoing renovation.

That believers are active in their sanctification is evinced further in Calvin's commentary on Romans 6. Commenting on verse 13, Calvin shows that Paul is teaching us "what course *we* must follow if we would cast off [sin's] yoke."<sup>15</sup> Paul, Calvin explains, teaches that "Christians ought to regard all their members as the weapons of spiritual warfare" so they may present themselves wholly to God, restrain themselves from sin, regard God's will alone, embrace his commands, and prepare to "obey his orders," aspiring "to his glory alone."<sup>16</sup> And on verse 14, Calvin remarks that Paul had previously "exhorted [believers] to apply all their powers in obedience to righteousness."<sup>17</sup> Thus, believers are to employ their mind and will, which are being renewed by the Spirit, to progress toward holiness, becoming like God and giving him honor. Yet Calvin is quick to relay the consolation he perceives in Paul's exhortation: although believers pursue and perform righteousness only imperfectly, God does not look upon their works with strict judgment and instead accepts them as perfect.<sup>18</sup> Thus, one's *renovatio* does not depend ultimately upon one's deeds but upon God's unmerited favor.

Still, Calvin connects good works to *renovatio* in his concluding comments on 6:14, stating that the Spirit forms us "anew to good works." He then explains that while we will find many imperfections in our works, we nevertheless "are enabled to conquer [sin] by the Spirit of God."<sup>19</sup> He later explains that God's goal in liberating us from sin is that he may "renew righteousness in us."<sup>20</sup> And according to Calvin, *righteousness* is "the rule of righteous living, the purpose of which is sanctification."<sup>21</sup> The end goal of good works and living according to righteousness is our sanctification. And these statements on pursuing righteousness and performing good works are made within the larger context of Calvin's discussion of mortification/vivification. It is clear from the

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<sup>15</sup> *Comm. Rom. 6:13, COR II/XIII:125.*

<sup>16</sup> *Comm. Rom. 6:13, COR II/XIII:125-126.*

<sup>17</sup> *Comm. Rom. 6:14, COR II/XIII:126.*

<sup>18</sup> *Comm. Rom. 6:14, COR II/XIII:126-127.*

<sup>19</sup> *Comm. Rom. 6:14, COR II/XIII:127.*

<sup>20</sup> *Comm. Rom. 6:17, COR II/XIII:129.* This further evinces that sanctification is the *finis* of the gospel (cf. "2.3. Humanity in Christ").

<sup>21</sup> *Comm. Rom. 6:19, COR II/XIII:131.*

context of Calvin's comments on Romans 6, therefore, that *renovatio* leads to good works or the cultivation of *iustitia*, and that the cultivation of *iustitia* performed by believers in turn leads to ongoing *renovatio*.

Animated by the Spirit, believers play an active role in fighting against the relics of their sinful flesh (i.e., mortification), which is the necessary requisite for renovation and the pursuit of righteousness (i.e., vivification). Good works, then, are a means by which believers are made increasingly righteous or holy at the experiential level. As was stated in chapters 2-3, Calvin does not teach that believers can attain perfection in this life. Still, while their progress is minimal, they advance nonetheless by the power of God's Spirit, who will complete their redemption at the resurrection.<sup>22</sup>

## 4.2. Good Works and Communion with God

Calvin not only ascribes activity to believers in their own renewal, but also sees holiness as a means whereby believers enjoy deeper communion with God. George Hunsinger states that Calvin moves in a curious direction when writing, "When we hear mention of our union with God, let us remember that holiness must be its bond."<sup>23</sup> It may seem odd that Calvin would suggest that holiness binds us to God. After all, he states emphatically that union with Christ, who is the "bond of our adoption,"<sup>24</sup> comes not by human works but by faith, which is a divine gift. As Hunsinger notes, Calvin's claim that holiness unites us to God seems to offset the bulk of his teaching.<sup>25</sup> Hunsinger is not amiss in his assessment, for one is hard-pressed to find additional statements in Calvin's *corpus* that

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<sup>22</sup> See *Comm. Phil.* 3:10-12, *CO* 52:50-51. Cf. Wendel, *Calvin*, 245: "The grace that God accords to his elect in Jesus Christ is irresistible, and is accompanied by gifts that enable them to struggle effectually against sin and to make progress on the path to holiness." While Calvin does not use the word *irresistible*, he does teach that "grace is not offered to us in such a way that afterwards we have the option either to submit or to resist [*refragari*]" (*BLW* 174, *COR* IV/III:252; cf. *Inst.* 2.3.10 [1539], *OS* 3:285). Further, in describing God's grace and the manner in which he bestows it, Calvin frequently uses words like *efficax* (*efficacious/effective*) (see *Inst.* 2.3.10 [1539], *OS* 3:285; *Inst.* 3.21.7 [1559], *OS* 4:377; *BLW* 174, *COR* IV/III:252) and *efficaciter* (*effectively/effectually*) (see *Inst.* 1.9.3 [1539], *OS* 3:84; *Inst.* 2.3.10 [1539,1559], *OS* 3:285-286; *Inst.* 3.1.1 [1536/1559], *OS* 4:2; *BLW* 114,136, *COR* IV/III:186,209). Still, Wendel's main point is accurate: the Spirit enables believers to successfully fight their sinful flesh and progress in holiness of life. On whether Calvin believes grace is irresistible, see André Pinard, "La Notion de Grâce Irrésistible dans la *Response aux Calomnies D'Albert Pighius* de Jean Calvin," PhD Thesis (Université Laval, 2006), especially 285-289,327-340.

<sup>23</sup> *Inst.* 3.6.2 (1539), *OS* 4:147. See Hunsinger, "Two Simultaneities," 323. Looking at other passages in Calvin's *corpus*, Zachman, "Grateful Humility," 46-47, states that communion with God, not just with Christ, is humanity's highest goal and that becoming like God, which is possible only by restoration in Christ, leads to this union.

<sup>24</sup> *Inst.* 3.6.3 (1539), *OS* 4:148.

<sup>25</sup> Hunsinger, "Two Simultaneities," 323.

either parallel his statement in *Institutio* 3.6.2 or elucidate its intended meaning. This does not mean, however, that Calvin's statement is haphazard and singular, even if it is mystifying and if one struggles to find other such statements in his work. As we continue reading the *Institutio*, and consult several of his commentaries, it becomes clear what Calvin means when he connects personal holiness to communion with God.

After asserting that holiness binds us to God, Calvin elaborates by articulating first that after we were "dispersed like stray sheep and scattered through the labyrinth of the world, [God] has gathered us together again to join us with himself." So when Scripture instructs us to be holy as God is holy (Lev. 19:1; 1 Pet. 1:16), Calvin explains, it is not "by virtue of our holiness" that "we come into communion with him." He reiterates what he intimates both explicitly and implicitly throughout the bulk of his work: personal holiness is not the cause of our union with God. "Rather," Calvin continues, "we ought first to cleave unto him *so that*, infused with his holiness, we may follow whither he calls." The reason we are united to God in the first place is that we may live holily to his glory, asserting again that sanctification is the "goal of our calling to which we must ever look."<sup>26</sup> Randall Zachman rightly states that holiness "arises from our participation in the death and life of Christ, which restores the image of God in us."<sup>27</sup> And we can participate in Christ's death and resurrection only if we are first united to him by Spirit-created faith. Participation in Christ's suffering and glory leads to one's continual renovation. Holiness, therefore, is *derivative of* communion, not *prior to* it. Yet this does not prevent Calvin from teaching that holiness, a gift from God cultivated in us by the Spirit, is a means by which we enjoy fellowship with God.<sup>28</sup> Calvin dichotomizes wickedness and holiness, stating that the former *is* fellowship with the ungodly whereas the latter *is* fellowship with God. Further,

To be reckoned among the people of the Lord we must dwell in the holy city of Jerusalem [cf. Ps. 116:19; 122:2-9]. As he has consecrated this city to himself, it is unlawful to profane it with the impurity of its inhabitants. Whence these declarations: there will be a place in God's tabernacle for those who walk

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<sup>26</sup> *Inst.* 3.6.2 (1539), *OS* 4:147. Cf. Wright, *Calvin's Salvation*, 75, who demonstrates that Calvin sometimes constitutes justification as its own goal, while other times states that its goal is sanctification. In a sense, both are true. Justification is an end in itself because our sanctification can never lead to full assurance. In another sense, sanctification is the goal of justification because God wants to change believers experientially. Cf. Raith, *After Merit*, 109. As Calvin states in *Inst.* 3.3.19 (1539/1536), *OS* 4:76, God gives believers sanctification simultaneously with justification so they may be restored to "true righteousness," implying that justification alone does not achieve such.

<sup>27</sup> Zachman, *Assurance*, 196.

<sup>28</sup> Billings, *Calvin*, 151-158, likewise argues that obedience to the law is communion with God.



without blemish and strive after righteousness [Ps. 15:1-2; cf. Ps. 14:1-2, Vg.; cf. also Ps. 24:3-4]. For it is highly unfitting that the sanctuary in which he dwells should be a stable crammed with filth.<sup>29</sup>

The pursuit of holiness and righteousness proves that one belongs to and is united to God. Moreover, only those who seek righteousness are said to dwell in God's presence—for those admitted into fellowship with him are given both justification and sanctification, the latter of which enables believers to pursue righteousness. Yet if we neglect to "give and devote ourselves to righteousness, we not only revolt from our Creator with wicked perfidy but we also abjure our Saviour himself."<sup>30</sup> Calvin even asserts that "there is no intercourse with Christ save for those who have perceived the right understanding of Christ from the word of the gospel," and that those who "were not taught that they must put on him have not rightly learned Christ, as they have not put off the old man." Only those who display fruits of repentance/sanctification are said to have a true knowledge of Christ and fellowship with him. Calvin then describes more precisely true knowledge of the gospel: "For it is a doctrine not of the tongue but of life. It is not apprehended by the understanding and memory alone, as other disciples are, but it is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds a seat and resting place in the inmost affection of the heart. . . . It must enter our heart and pass into our daily living, and so transform us into itself that it may not be unfruitful for us."<sup>31</sup> Calvin's point is that true faith, which unites us to Christ, expresses itself in obedience to God, though Calvin immediately makes the qualification that believers will never attain perfection in this life.<sup>32</sup> Thus, when he states in this chapter that holiness is our bond to God, he means not that personal piety is the *primary cause* of communion with God. Nevertheless, it is the *proof* of communion. Only those whose have been transformed and begin to obey God in sincerity of heart are said to have true communion with Christ, and those who do not display fruits of regeneration/sanctification are said not to have Christ. Moreover, holiness is a means whereby believers *remain in* and *enjoy* fellowship with God—for we "revolt from" and "abjure" our Creator and Savior if we do not pursue holiness.

In the next chapter, Calvin suggests something similar in explaining Titus 2:12, stating that "godliness [*pietas*] . . . joins us in true holiness [*vera sanctitate*] with God

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<sup>29</sup> *Inst.* 3.6.2 (mainly 1539), *OS* 4:148.

<sup>30</sup> *Inst.* 3.6.3 (1539), *OS* 4:148.

<sup>31</sup> *Inst.* 3.6.4 (1539), *OS* 4:149.

<sup>32</sup> See *Inst.* 3.6.5 (mainly 1539), *OS* 4:150.

when we are separated from the iniquities of the world.”<sup>33</sup> While Calvin does not elaborate upon this, it seems he is reiterating what he explained in 3.6—that godliness or holiness is not the principal cause of communion but is the manner by which believers remain in and enjoy communion with God. Calvin’s commentary on Titus shows that he understands *pietas* as religion toward God, which is set forth in the first table of the Decalogue.<sup>34</sup> This is distinct from *iustitia*, which has particular reference to our dealings with others and “embraces all the duties of equity in order that to each one be rendered what is his own.”<sup>35</sup> Calvin presents a similar idea in his commentary on Ephesians 4:24, wherein he refers to *sanctitas* as “the purity by which we are consecrated to God” and “pertains to the first table of the law.”<sup>36</sup> Calvin uses both *pietas* and *sanctitas* in reference to observance of the first part of the Decalogue. And in his commentary on Hebrews 12:14, he asserts, “Even though the whole world blazes with war, we must not let go of sanctification [*sanctimonia*] because *it is the chain which binds us in union with God*.” Further, “no one can see God without sanctification [*sanctimonia*] since we shall only see God with eyes which have been renewed according to his image.” In this context, Calvin describes *sanctimonia* as an “especial regard to God” that prevents believers from having friendship with the wicked, whereby they would be defiled and polluted.<sup>37</sup> As in the *Institutio*, he contrasts wickedness with holiness—the former being a means whereby we associate with the world, the latter a means whereby we associate or commune with God.

In *Institutio* 3.17.6, Calvin again takes up the issue of good works and fellowship with God, though he does not state explicitly that holiness binds us to God. Rather, he indicates such in explaining why rewards are promised on the condition of obedience, writing, “But when it is said that ‘the Lord keeps a covenant of mercy with those who love him’ [cf. Deut. 7:9; I Kings 8:23; Neh. 1:5], this indicates what kind of servants they are who have undertaken his covenant in good faith rather than express the reason why the Lord benefits them.” According to Calvin, the ultimate reason God enters into and keeps covenant with his people, and even rewards them, is clear throughout Scripture: it is of his gratuitous mercy, not human merit. Further, the end for which God has adopted us and given us “the grace of eternal life” is that “he may be loved, feared,

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<sup>33</sup> *Inst.* 3.7.3 (1559), *OS* 4:153.

<sup>34</sup> *Comm.* Tit. 2:12, *CO* 52:423.

<sup>35</sup> *Inst.* 3.7.3 (1559), *OS* 4:153. Cf. *Comm.* Tit. 2:12, *CO* 52:423.

<sup>36</sup> *Comm.* Eph. 2:24, *COR* II/XVI:245.

<sup>37</sup> *Comm.* Heb. 12:14, *CO* 55:178. Cf. *Comm.* 1 John 1:5, *COR* II/XX:145-146.

and honored by us.”<sup>38</sup> Calvin then states, “We must ever strive in the direction of our call” so that we do not “renounce our right of adoption.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, while believers could never *enter* God’s family by their own endeavors, they nonetheless *remain* there and *prove* their adoption by striving toward holiness. While the obedience of believers is not the principal cause of their union with God, it is the manner whereby they are shown to be his children, kept in fellowship with him, and introduced into his kingdom.<sup>40</sup> This is reinforced at the end of this section:

It is not the *foundation* by which believers stand firm before God that is described but the *means* whereby our most merciful Father introduces them into his fellowship, and protects and strengthens them therein. . . . Therefore if one seeks the first cause that opens for the saints the door to God’s Kingdom, and hence gives them a permanent standing-ground in it, at once we answer: Because the Lord by his own mercy has adopted them once for all, and keeps them continually. But if the question is of the *manner*, we must proceed to regeneration.<sup>41</sup>

Looking at this entire section, it is clear that Calvin is speaking not of communion with God generally, which believers enjoy once united to Christ, but the fellowship that they shall experience in the eschaton. This does not detract from Calvin’s statements earlier about holiness being our bond to God, but rather reveals another facet of his teaching on good works and communion. Collectively, Calvin’s teachings reveal that holiness is fellowship with God in this life and the manner whereby God will introduce us into his everlasting kingdom because “in those who are directed to the good by his Spirit he recognizes the only genuine insignia of his children.”<sup>42</sup>

A similar teaching is reinforced in Calvin’s commentary on 2 Peter 1:4, wherein he states, “The image of God in holiness and righteousness is reborn in us on the condition of our sharing in eternal life and glory, so far as is necessary for complete blessedness.” From the immediate context, we learn that partaking of eternal life and glory is concomitant with communion with God: “we shall be partakers of divine immortality and the glory of blessedness, and thus we shall be in a way one with God so far as our capacity allows.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, the restoration of the divine image (i.e.,

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<sup>38</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.6 (1539), *OS* 4:258.

<sup>39</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.6 (1539), *OS* 4:259.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Zachman, *Assurance*, 196: “Holiness of life is not the basis of our union with God, but it is the means by which God brings those whom he has freely adopted into fellowship with himself.”

<sup>41</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.6 (1539), *OS* 4:259.

<sup>42</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.6 (1539), *OS* 4:259.

<sup>43</sup> *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:4, *COR* II/XX:328.

righteousness and holiness) in us—which is accomplished ultimately by God though not apart from our own activity—leads to deeper and more intimate fellowship with God and thus eternal blessedness.<sup>44</sup> This brings to mind Calvin’s understanding of prelapsarian humans, who were given the supernatural gifts so they might become more God-like and thus enjoy more intimate communion with him and eternal bliss. And what was possible for original humanity is guaranteed for believers, who have been inextricably united to Christ and given a richer measure of grace, which is effective for believers.

Given what we discovered in chapter 3—that the manner of justification differs after regeneration—it is not surprising that Calvin admits that holiness, which believers cultivate in Christ by the Spirit, is a means whereby believers commune with God, though it is not the principal cause for such communion or the reason that believers are brought into communion with him in the first place. Further, it is not that faith without works unites us to Christ at the beginning of the Christian life and that works take over the role of maintaining that union, as if faith had finished its job or where insufficient. Holiness, which is the ongoing work of the Spirit in the redeemed, is the fruit of faith and is never produced apart from faith.

### 4.3. Good Works and Assurance

Significant debate has abounded over whether Calvin holds a form of the *sylogismus practicus*. Wilhelm Niesel claimed that it is impossible to locate a *doctrine* of assurance based on good works in Calvin’s theology. Rather, he argued, Calvin simply makes a *concession* to his Catholic opponents that works point to being in a state of grace.<sup>45</sup> Other interpreters have argued conversely: for Calvin, good works prove one belongs to

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<sup>44</sup> The eschatological fellowship that Calvin describes in both *Institutes* 3.17.6 and *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:4 seems distinct from the “second communion” that he discusses in his letter to Peter Martyr Vermigli dated 8 August 1555 (CO 15:722-725; see the partial English translation in *Gleanings of a Few Scattered Ears During the Period of Reformation in England and of the Times Immediately Succeeding; A.D. 1533 to A.D. 1588*, trans. and ed. George Cornelius Gorham [London: Bell and Daldy, 1857], 349-352). Calvin describes this second communion as an effect of the first—namely, the union believers have with Christ by faith. This second communion is linked to a “second influence” of the Spirit by which Christ’s gifts are enriched in us. It seems that this communion increases godly qualities in us, and increases in itself. This communion is offered to believers in the Lord’s Supper—though Calvin does not state that it is offered exclusively in the meal—and binds believers more closely to Christ, giving them a richer measure of himself and his benefits. Cf. Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 273-287.

<sup>45</sup> Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 170-181. For critical interaction with Niesel, see G.C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 287-293; Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 214-215.

God.<sup>46</sup> While Calvin's understanding of assurance relates to multiple themes in his theology, we will focus principally on its relation to good works. More specifically, we will explore the *grounds* of assurance, showing that Calvin indeed sees good works as a basis for assurance.

Throughout his *corpus*, Calvin emphasizes that works can never serve as the ultimate basis for assurance. In his *Antidote* to Trent, he exclaims that assurance cannot "depend on the view of works."<sup>47</sup> One reason Calvin opposes making works the ground of assurance is that he saw a danger in lodging our confidence in something within ourselves.<sup>48</sup> Doing so would undermine and blaspheme Christ's work, rendering it insufficient. Moreover, because regeneration will never render us perfect in this life, one's obedience will never provide true assurance. As Lane states, "Any attempt to base assurance on such works is doomed to failure, since the tender conscience will soon see the inadequacy of the foundation."<sup>49</sup> Following Augustine, Calvin explains that when we look to our good works, which are "overwhelmed by a multitude of sins," our "conscience feels more fear and consternation than assurance."<sup>50</sup> Just as we must look outside ourselves to stand righteous *coram Deo*, so we must look outside ourselves for assurance. Assurance, therefore, is grounded in God's free pardon in Christ.<sup>51</sup> Calvin states, "This certainty far surmounts anything that we can grasp for ourselves especially when anyone applies it personally."<sup>52</sup> In ourselves, we are sinful and destitute of righteousness. To be assured of salvation, therefore, we must look to Christ, who alone is our righteousness.

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<sup>46</sup> See Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 72-78; Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 287-294; Anthony N.S. Lane, "Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance Revisited," in *Tributes to John Calvin: A Celebration of His Quincentenary*, ed. David W. Hall (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2009), 277-279; Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 213-215; Susan E. Schreiner, "John Calvin," in *The Decalogue through the Centuries*, eds. Jeffrey P. Greenman and Timothy Larsen (Louisville: WJKP, 2012), 130-131; Zachman, *Assurance*, 198-203.

<sup>47</sup> *Antidote* in *Tracts* 3:146, *CO* 7:472.

<sup>48</sup> See *Antidote* in *Tracts* 3:146, *CO* 7:472; Lane, "Assurance Revisited," 277-278.

<sup>49</sup> Lane, "Assurance Revisited," 278.

<sup>50</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.20 (1543), *OS* 4:238. Cf. Lane, "Assurance Revisited," 278; *True Method* in *Tracts* 244-245, *CO* 7:595.

<sup>51</sup> See *Inst.* 3.13.5 (1559), *OS* 4:220; *True Method* in *Tracts* 250, *CO* 7:599.

<sup>52</sup> *Comm.* Heb. 11:6, *CO* 55:149. Cf. *Inst.* 3.14.16 (1539,1559), *OS* 4:234-235.

Christ, therefore, is the ultimate ground for assurance: “Confidence of salvation is founded upon Christ and rests on the promises of the gospel.”<sup>53</sup> Not even faith is the primary ground of assurance. We recall from chapter 2 that faith itself is nothing more than an empty vessel that receives Christ and his benefits. Yet while faith is not the primary ground of assurance, it is nevertheless likened to certitude. Faith is “a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promises in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>54</sup> Simply put, faith (*fides*) is confidence (*fiducia*).<sup>55</sup> Yet while faith is confidence in God’s promise to be a merciful and loving Father to us,<sup>56</sup> it cannot serve as the primary ground for assurance because as long as it is “in the *believer*,” who is still sinful, it is imperfect and vacillates.<sup>57</sup> Just as faith itself does not save but rather apprehends Christ and his benefits, so faith is not the ultimate ground of assurance yet nevertheless rests upon the ultimate ground—Christ. Lane explains, “The ground of assurance cannot be distinguished from the ground of faith itself—Christ and the promises of God.” Thus, “the primary ground of assurance is objective,”<sup>58</sup>—outside us, fixed and not dependent upon our subjective experiences.

This, however, does not prevent Calvin from teaching that subjective experiences, such as good works, serve as subordinate grounds for assurance. Our lives can show that we are indeed justified and regenerated. In discussing repentance, Calvin states that when the sinner considers the future judgment and is filled with the fear of

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<sup>53</sup> *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. John K.S. Reid (London: James Clark, 1961), 56, quoted in Lane, “Assurance Revisited,” 276; *CO* 8:260. Lane, 275-276, also rightly states, “It is important to distinguish between the primary ground [Christ], that on which faith must rest for assurance, and other secondary grounds that can confirm and strengthen this confidence.” Cf. Beeke, *Assurance*, 55; Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 206-208; Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 284-289; Zachman, *Assurance*, 202.

<sup>54</sup> *Inst.* 3.2.7 (1539), *OS* 4:16.

<sup>55</sup> See *Inst.* 3.2.15 (1539), *OS* 4:26; Lane, “Assurance Revisited,” 272; Michael Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life: Glorifying and Enjoying God Forever* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 99; idem., *Justification*, 1:214. Melancthon, *Romans* 29-33, 108, 127, *CR* 15:514-519, 597, 617; *CTT* 152-157, *CR* 21:745-751, also teaches that *fides* is *fiducia*.

<sup>56</sup> See *Inst.* 3.2.41 (1536), *OS* 4:51; Beeke, *Assurance*, 49-50. Cf. Lane, “Assurance Revisited,” 271-272, 282; and Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life*, 99, who emphasize the personal aspect of faith and assurance, that faith is confidence in God’s promises *to me*.

<sup>57</sup> Lane, “Calvin and Article 5,” 255 (emphasis original). Cf. idem., “Assurance Revisited,” 272, 281; Beeke, *Assurance*, 51-54; Stuermann, *A Critical Study*, 112-116, 236-243. See *Inst.* 3.2.4 (1539), *OS* 4:12, wherein Calvin states that unbelief is always mixed with faith; and 3.2.17-20 (1539, 1559), *OS* 4:27-30, wherein he explains that faith is imperfect, touched by doubt and anxiety.

<sup>58</sup> Lane, “Assurance Revisited,” 282.

God, he must assess his current manner of life and then “reflect upon another mode of life *whereby he may be able to stand firm in that judgment*.”<sup>59</sup> Justifying faith, which expresses itself in repentance, necessarily turns one from sin and toward godliness. When this happens, the believer is assured that he has received Christ. The quality of the believer’s life on earth, therefore, gives him confidence that he will one day stand securely before God.

This would seem to contradict what is already in place—that we can never look within ourselves for assurance. However, Calvin is not instructing believers to lodge confidence *in themselves*.<sup>60</sup> Rather, it becomes clear as his teaching on the *duplex gratia* progresses in *Institutio* book 3 that while believers may indeed gain confidence from the work of the Spirit in them, Calvin emphasizes God’s mercy and the gifts he has freely given those whom he has graciously adopted. Thus, even though good works serve as supplementary aids of assurance, believers must remember that their works originate from God alone. Still, because God has regenerated believers, causing them to do what is spiritually good, they may view their holy living as a sign that they are saved.

This is evident at the beginning of Calvin’s discussion of the Christian life in the *Institutio*, wherein he states, “The object of regeneration . . . is to manifest in the life of believers a harmony and agreement between God’s righteousness and their obedience, and thus to confirm the adoption that they have received as sons.”<sup>61</sup> While holy living is not the ultimate basis of assurance, it is nevertheless a means whereby God proves that believers are his children.

This is confirmed by numerous passages in Calvin’s commentaries. Expounding 2 Peter 1:10—“give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure”—Calvin explains that “an upright life” proves that “we are truly elected by God and not called in vain.”<sup>62</sup> Calvin even mentions that some biblical manuscripts insert “by good works”

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<sup>59</sup> *Inst.* 3.3.7 (1539), *OS* 4:61.

<sup>60</sup> See Beeke, *Assurance*, 76; Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 59-60.

<sup>61</sup> *Inst.* 3.6.1 (1559), *OS* 4:146. Cf. 3.17.6 (1539), *OS* 4:25, wherein Calvin states that while right conduct is not the foundation by which we stand before God, it is the manner whereby God confirms that we are his.

<sup>62</sup> *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:10, *COR* II/XX:332. Commenting on this section of Calvin’s commentary, Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 177-178, states that Calvin simply teaches that holiness contrasts believers from non-believers. According to Calvin, Niesel argues, the apostle does not “invite” believers to take confidence in works (178). Indeed, Calvin does not encourage believers to look to their works as if something *in themselves* provides confidence, but he does say that “a good conscience and integrity of life,” which have a divine and not a human origin, prove one’s election.

into the apostle's text,<sup>63</sup> though unnecessarily. Yet he does not oppose reading "good works" into the apostle's meaning, because the addition "makes no alteration in the sense, because it is to be understood even if it is not specifically expressed." For Calvin, therefore, "good works" is synonymous with "an upright life," and the two prove one's election. Yet, as is typical when Calvin speaks positively of works, he qualifies his statement, explaining that if "the stability of our calling and election depends on good works . . . it follows that it depends on us." Calvin could entertain no such thought. Rather, "the unanimous teaching of Scripture is that our election is founded first and foremost on the eternal decree of God, and that our calling is thereafter begun and perfected by His gratuitous goodness."<sup>64</sup> While good works do not *cause* our election and salvation, they nevertheless *prove* them.<sup>65</sup> This is a distinction that, in Calvin's mind, the Sophists failed to make. According to him, they absurdly turned the proof into the cause.<sup>66</sup> What is *not* absurd, however, is that "everyone confirms his calling" by living holily.<sup>67</sup> Yet "this does not prevent election from being gratuitous, nor does it shew that it is *in our own hand or power* to confirm election." God is the one who has elected us—that we may be "pure and spotless in his sight"—and "follows through His continuous course of calling by His sheer grace."<sup>68</sup> We see again that Calvin ascribes activity to both God and believers, though believers' activity in confirming their calling originates ultimately from God. And as Calvin writes in his Romans commentary, "regeneration by the Spirit of God to innocence and holiness" is "the most certain mark by which the sons of God are distinguished from the children of the world."<sup>69</sup> Or as he explains in his commentary on 1 John, "We cannot know our Lord and Father as he shews himself without on our side showing ourselves dutiful children and obedient servants." While "the certainty of faith dwells only in Christ's grace," Calvin elaborates, "godliness and holiness of life distinguish true faith from a fictitious and dead

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<sup>63</sup> COR II/XX:332n.29 states that "the 1545 Biblia has *per bona opera*."

<sup>64</sup> *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:10, COR II/XX:332.

<sup>65</sup> Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 289, comments similarly on Calvin's *Comm.* 1 John 3:14, stating that Calvin distinguishes between the "foundation" and "signs" of salvation.

<sup>66</sup> *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:10, COR II/XX:333. Cf. *Comm.* 1 John 4:17, COR II/XX:220.

<sup>67</sup> *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:10, COR II/XX:332. Cf. *Comm.* 1 John 2:3, COR II/XX:157.

<sup>68</sup> *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:10, COR II/XX:333.

<sup>69</sup> *Comm.* Rom. 8:9, COR II/XIII:160.



knowledge of God.”<sup>70</sup> Conversely, the lack of regeneration of nonbelievers shows that they are not God’s children.<sup>71</sup>

We find similar content in Calvin’s commentary on Psalm 15. Expounding verse 1, he teaches that “if we really wish to be reckoned among the number of the children of God . . . we must show ourselves to be such by a holy and an upright life; for it is not enough to serve God by outward ceremonies, unless we also live uprightly, and without doing wrong to our neighbours.”<sup>72</sup> Commenting on verse 2, he states that whoever “takes to practise righteousness and equity towards his neighbours” shows that he “fears God.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, those who keep the second table of the law are considered “permanent citizens of the church” rather than “strangers who are mingled among them only for a time.”<sup>74</sup> And it is clear from the context of Calvin’s exposition that he sees this psalm as a teaching for the church that enables believers to know both the condition upon which they were called and whether their lives demonstrate that they possess true faith.

In teaching that good works are a basis of assurance, Calvin does not neglect *how* works and faith relate as regards assurance. Just as he acknowledges that good works are a subordinate means of justification after regeneration, so he acknowledges that works are a subordinate ground for assurance. He explains, “The saints, when it is a question of the founding and establishing of their own salvation, without regard for works turn their eyes solely to God’s goodness.”<sup>75</sup> And they look to God’s goodness not only at the beginning but also in the fulfillment of blessedness. God’s mercy alone is the foundation of our salvation. More particularly, Christ alone, who is apprehended by faith, is the ultimate ground of assurance. Yet when the believer’s conscience is founded upon God’s free mercy in Christ, her conscience is “established *also* in the consideration of works, so far, that is, as they are testimonies of God dwelling and ruling in us.”<sup>76</sup> Further, “Inasmuch, therefore, as this reliance upon works has no place *unless you first cast the whole confidence of your mind upon God’s mercy*, it ought not to seem contrary

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<sup>70</sup> *Comm.* 1 John 2:3, *COR II/XX*:157. Calvin interprets this passage in light of Col. 3:9, wherein he sees Paul teaching that those who are in Christ have also put off the “the old man.”

<sup>71</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.7 (1539), *OS* 4:226.

<sup>72</sup> *Comm.* Ps. 15:1, *CO* 31:143. Cf. *Serm. Ten Commandments* 247, *CO* 26:392, wherein Calvin states that living in justice and equity with our neighbors demonstrates that we are God’s children.

<sup>73</sup> *Comm.* Ps. 15:2, *CO* 31:144.

<sup>74</sup> *Comm.* Ps. 15:1, *CO* 31:143.

<sup>75</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.18 (1539), *OS* 4:236.

<sup>76</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.18 (1539), *OS* 4:236.

to that upon which it depends.”<sup>77</sup> Calvin affirms that once the believer has faith in Christ and rests upon God’s free pardon, works serve as a secondary ground for assurance that does not contradict or nullify the ultimate ground. The believer can rely on works *if* she first places her whole confidence in God. A proper reliance on works is grounded in total reliance on God, since our ability to pursue and perform righteousness is contingent upon God’s goodness toward us and activity in us. Assuredly, works can never be the primary basis for assurance, yet when the believer has already rested on God’s free mercy, works confirm God’s work in the believer.

Yet Calvin offers a qualification or warning, stating that “the Christian mind may not be turned back to *the merit of works* as to a help toward salvation but should rely wholly on the free promise of righteousness [i.e., justification].”<sup>78</sup> While he does not forbid the believer from “undergirding and strengthening [his] faith by signs of the divine benevolence toward him,” he does forbid the believer from viewing his works as meritorious or as supplements to what supposedly lacks in God’s work.<sup>79</sup> Again, Calvin sees any righteous deed performed by the believer as a free gift from God. And such works are non-meritorious, since the believer’s participation in God’s work is imperfect. Any worth ascribed to works, then, comes from God’s gratuitous mercy. Nor is it the case that faith provides partial assurance of salvation and that works provide increased assurance. Rather, believers must lodge their hope fully in Christ. Yet it is precisely because good works are the very result of gratuitous mercy, “the gifts God has bestowed upon us,” that they serve “like rays of the divine countenance by which we are illumined to contemplate that supreme light of goodness.” Moreover, “the grace of good works . . . shows that the Spirit of adoption has been given to us.”<sup>80</sup> Recalling Calvin’s comments on James 2, which we discussed in chapter 3, we remember that good works are the manifestation of living faith. For this reason, Calvin is comfortable viewing good works as a subordinate ground for assurance, “a secondary support.”<sup>81</sup> This does not mean, however, as Lane rightly explains, “that Christ shows us the basis for salvation and that works then demonstrate to us that we have attained that salvation, with works

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<sup>77</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.18 (1539), *OS* 4:236-237.

<sup>78</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.18 (1539), *OS* 4:237.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *Inst.* 3.17.1 (1539), *OS* 4:237. Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 60, rightly remarks that Calvin’s “real problem is not with works per se, but with the notion of merit.” Cf. Raith, *After Merit*, especially 83-87.

<sup>80</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.18 (1539), *OS* 4:237.

<sup>81</sup> *Comm.* 1 John 4:17, *COR* II/XX:220. Cf. *Comm.* 1 John 3:19, *COR* II/XX:199, wherein Calvin calls love “an accessory or inferior aid, a prop to our faith.”

functioning as the second stage of a process. Rather, Christ and the gospel shows us that we in particular are accepted by God, and this assurance or conviction is then strengthened when it is confirmed by further evidence.”<sup>82</sup>

Calvin goes even further by stating that believers may be assured that they have true faith and possess Christ not simply because they *perform* good deeds, but also because they *strive* to live a life pleasing to God. In discussing repentance, Calvin writes, “The more earnestly any [regenerate] man measures his life by the standard of God’s law, the surer are the signs of repentance that he shows.”<sup>83</sup> And commenting on 1 John 2:3, he states that believers may know they are God’s if they “strive to form their lives in obedience to God.”<sup>84</sup> Believers, who have been given a new heart, know they are God’s children because of their sincere desire to obey God. Yet again, Calvin qualifies his teaching, stating that *timor Dei* does not establish “full assurance” because it cannot lay “a foundation to strengthen the conscience.” God’s mercy in Christ is the sole foundation of salvation and assurance. Still, this does not prevent Calvin from affirming that *timor Dei* and good works provide *some* assurance “when taken a posteriori”: “But since they take the fruits of regeneration as proof of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, from this they are greatly strengthened to wait for God’s help in all their necessities, seeing that in this very great matter they experience him as Father. And they cannot do even this unless they first apprehend God’s goodness, sealed by nothing else than the certainty of the promise.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, a proper order exists when considering faith and works in relation to assurance. Faith apprehends the promises of God in Christ, who alone is the ultimate ground of assurance, yet works serve as a secondary ground once faith is established.

For Calvin, however, it is not *believers themselves* but *God’s work in the believer* that offers assurance of salvation.<sup>86</sup> Certainly, believers participate in God’s activity, but because their activity is imperfect, the inner working of the Spirit is what confirms faith and proves adoption. For Calvin, Beeke remarks, the goal of the Christian “is not to examine his works *in themselves* but to observe *the Spirit’s* work of grace in

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<sup>82</sup> Lane, “Assurance Revisited,” 279.

<sup>83</sup> *Inst.* 3.3.16 (1559), *OS* 4:72.

<sup>84</sup> *Comm.* 1 John 2:3, *COR* II/XX:157.

<sup>85</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.19 (1539), *OS* 4:237. See Beeke, *Assurance*, 74,

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Beeke, *Assurance*, 76.

his life. The former contain no grounds of rest; the latter provide peace of conscience as they are viewed in Christ.”<sup>87</sup> Or as Richard Muller explains,

It is in and through Christ that the connection may be drawn between election and calling, calling and faith, faith and sanctification, sanctification and assurance. The connection between sanctification and assurance, moreover, does not represent pridefulness of and overemphasis on works. . . . The works by which we gain assurance are ultimately the work of Christ in us.<sup>88</sup>

#### 4.4. Good Works and Rewards

Calvin also teaches that good works are a basis for rewards, both in this life and the next.<sup>89</sup> Yet God assigns rewards proportioned to his favor rather than to the worth of works.<sup>90</sup> If God’s reward corresponded equally to the worth of our works, we would receive no reward, since God, in his strict judgment, requires perfect obedience. Therefore, God rewards believers because their works are acceptable to him only in consequence of free pardon, which he extends to us as a loving, gracious Father.<sup>91</sup>

Calvin explains this at length in his *Institutio*. After stating that our works are riddled with impurity and cannot merit divine favor or reward, he writes, “Those good works which he has bestowed upon us the Lord calls ‘ours,’ and testifies they not only are acceptable to him but also will have their reward.”<sup>92</sup> Good works, therefore, “are pleasing to God and are not unfruitful for their doers [i.e., the regenerate]. But they receive by way of reward the most ample benefits of God, not because they so deserve but because God’s kindness has of itself set this value on them.”<sup>93</sup> God delights in believers’ works, not because they are perfect *in se*, but because he has willed to

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Richard A. Muller, “Predestination and Christology in Sixteenth Century Reformed Theology,” PhD Dissertation (Duke University, 1976), 93-94, quoted in Beeke, *Assurance*, 77. Cf. Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 243.

<sup>89</sup> See *True Method* in *Tracts* 3:248, *CO* 7:597; *Inst.* 3.15.4 (1539), *OS* 4:243. On the content of rewards, see Raith, *After Merit*, 149-173. Cf. Lane, “The Role of Scripture,” 277-278. Here I am interested not in exploring the content of rewards, but in demonstrating that believers’ works are reasons for divine blessing. Nor am I interested in thoroughly analyzing *why* God promises rewards to believers, though a chief reason that God promises rewards is to stimulate believers toward obedience (see *Inst.* 2.8.4 [1539], *OS* 3:346).

<sup>90</sup> *True Method* in *Tracts* 3:248, *CO* 7:598. Raith, *After Merit*, 135-136, rightly explains that Calvin, when considering rewards for works, contrasts “due” with God’s “gratuitousness.”

<sup>91</sup> See *True Method* in *Tracts* 3:248, *CO* 7:598; *Comm.* Ps. 19:11, *CO* 31:204; *Comm.* Ps. 62:12, *CO* 31:593; *Antidote* in *Tracts* 3:135, *CO* 7:463.

<sup>92</sup> *Inst.* 3.15.3 (1539), *OS* 4:241.

<sup>93</sup> *Inst.* 3.15.3 (1539), *OS* 4:242.

mercifully accept them. This does not mean, however, that the good works of believers are not good, as was discussed in chapter 3. They are indeed good, though imperfectly good. This is why Calvin says they do not *deserve* reward. Similar to Bucer, Calvin teaches that God has willed to accept and reward believers' good works because of his mercy, and because such works originate ultimately from him.<sup>94</sup>

When considering more deeply the nature of reward, which is given to the “cultivators of righteousness and holiness,” Calvin suggests that its cause is threefold:

The first is: God, having turned his gaze from his servants' works, which always deserve reproof rather than praise, embraces his servants in Christ, and with faith alone intervening, reconciles them to himself without the help of works. The second is: of his own fatherly generosity and loving-kindness, and without considering their worth, he raises works to this place of honor, so that he attributes some value to them. The third is: He receives these very works with pardon, not imputing the imperfection with which they are all so corrupted that they would otherwise be reckoned as sins rather than virtues.<sup>95</sup>

Analyzing this passage in its immediate context, we observe first Calvin's emphasis on humanity's responsibility to cultivate righteousness and holiness—a chief reason we were created, as was discussed in chapter 2. God offers reward only to these people. Yet why would God reward the “faithful” when they cultivate righteousness and holiness imperfectly? The reason God rewards our imperfect good works is the same reason that he accepts them. He chooses to overlook the imperfections in our works and embrace our works in Christ.<sup>96</sup> God pardons the imperfections in our works and does not impute to them their due. He assigns them value that is incongruent with their inherent worth. Reward for works, therefore, is grounded in double justification: “But when the promises of the gospel are substituted, which proclaim the free forgiveness of sins, these not only make us acceptable to God but also render our works pleasing to him. And not only does the Lord adjudge them pleasing; he also extends to them the blessings which under the covenant were owed to the observance of the law.”<sup>97</sup> God rewards only those works that he has justified or accepted. And he rewards them as if they perfectly accorded with his law. Thus, the ultimate ground for both acceptance and reward is

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<sup>94</sup> Lugioyo, *Bucer's Doctrine of Justification*, 95: “[For Bucer], the works of a believer are accepted by God as worthy of merit not because they are so in themselves but because, first, God as decreed them to be such and, second, they are his very works in the believer.” See *B.Rom.*, 104; Lugioyo, *Bucer's Doctrine of Justification*, 218-219.

<sup>95</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.3 (1539), *OS* 4:256.

<sup>96</sup> See *Inst.* 3.15.4 (1539), *OS* 4:243. Cf. Raith, *After Merit*, 141-144; Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 33-39.

<sup>97</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.3 (1539), *OS* 4:255. Cf. 3.18.5 (mainly 1539, 1543), *OS* 4:274-276; *Comm.* Ps. 19:11, *CO* 31:204; *Comm.* 2 Tim. 4:8, *CO* 52:390-391.

God's mercy in Christ, which is received by faith. Faith, then, may also be said to be the reason why our works are rewarded, because faith apprehends Christ, the ultimate ground for the blessings that believers receive. As Raith remarks, "Why God accepts the person who deserves damnation, and why God rewards a work deserving damnation—have the same foundational answer: faith in Jesus Christ. For Calvin, inasmuch as faith is foundational for a person's being *considered* just before God, so faith is foundational for their works being *considered* reward-worthy."<sup>98</sup>

Calvin, therefore, distinguishes *reward* from *merit*, the latter of which implies that works deserve payment congruent with their inherent worth.<sup>99</sup> He also explains that when Scripture exhorts us to pursue righteousness, it sets forth God's mercy, which alone our salvation stands upon.<sup>100</sup> This is confirmed in Calvin's commentary on Hebrews 6:10, wherein he explains that because Scripture shows everywhere that "there is no other fount of salvation but the free mercy of God," the reward that God promises to works "depends on that free promise by which He adopts us as sons, and reconciles us to Himself by not imputing our sins to us." Therefore, "A reward is laid up for works not through merit but out of the sheer bounty of God." Calvin states further that there is a proper ordering of the acceptance and reward of works, explaining that the recompense of works takes place only after we are received into grace through the kindness of Christ.<sup>101</sup> Just as God is not obligated to accept our works, neither is he required to reward them. Yet God "has made Himself our debtor not by receiving anything from us, but by [graciously] promising us all things, as Augustine says."<sup>102</sup> The reason the writer of Hebrews says that God is just in rewarding works, therefore, is because "He is faithful and true."<sup>103</sup> God cannot help but keep His promises and love the work he has done in believers.<sup>104</sup> When Calvin speaks of reward for works, he does not mean reward for a mere human work. As is clear from our study thus far, Calvin sees

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<sup>98</sup> Raith, *After Merit*, 134-135 (emphasis original). Raith references *Comm. Heb. 11:6, CO 55:149*, wherein Calvin states, "Reward refers not to the worth or the price of works but to faith."

<sup>99</sup> See *Inst. 3.16.2*. Cf. Raith, *After Merit*, 135-136.

<sup>100</sup> *Inst. 3.16.3* (1539), *OS 4:251*.

<sup>101</sup> *Comm. Heb. 6:10, CO 55:74*.

<sup>102</sup> *Comm. Heb. 6:10, CO 55:75*. The translator renders *liberaliter* as "fully," which I have replaced with "graciously." Cf. *Comm. Ps. 19:11, CO 31:203*, wherein Calvin states that when "God enters into covenant with us," he "brings himself under obligation to recompense our obedience."

<sup>103</sup> *Comm. Heb. 6:10, CO 55:75*.

<sup>104</sup> *Comm. Heb. 6:10, CO 55:74*.

the good works of believers as originating from God, though these works may be called ours as well. Any spiritually good work is a participation in God's activity.<sup>105</sup> Reward, therefore, is always grace for grace, rightly understood.<sup>106</sup> Reward is a grace not only because God accepts our works by graciously overlooking their imperfections and by ascribing worth to them that is not due, but also because our works themselves are gifts from God. Quoting Augustine, Calvin argues against Pighius, "To whom could the righteous Judge award the earned crown, unless the merciful Father first gave unearned grace?"<sup>107</sup> He invokes the African bishop again:

Just as we from the time when we began to believe have obtained mercy not because we were faithful but so that we might be, so at the end he will crown us, as it is written, in mercy and compassion [Ps. 103:4]. Consequently even eternal life itself, which shall be enjoyed at the end and will certainly be granted on the basis of preceding merits—even that life is nevertheless called grace, because those merits for which it is granted were not acquired by us through our own ability, but were done in us through grace. [It is called grace] precisely because it is given freely—not that it is not given for merits, but that those very merits, for which it is given were themselves a gift.<sup>108</sup>

Moreover, Calvin qualifies, "God should not be believed to reward the right use of grace as if man, *by his own efforts*, rendered the grace which is offered to him effective; and the rewarding should not be thought of in such a way that grace is no more gratuitous."<sup>109</sup> So while God indeed rewards the good use of grace, the ability to use grace rightly is itself a gift from God.<sup>110</sup>

We find more details of Calvin's concept of reward in his lectures on Ezekiel 18. Commenting on verse 5, Calvin explains that Ezekiel teaches that "if any one faithfully keep the law, he shall prosper, since God will repay the reward of justice."<sup>111</sup> Throughout his remarks on this chapter, Calvin states repeatedly that believers are rewarded on account of their good deeds, though such deeds are imperfect. Further, believers are rewarded not simply because they themselves are accepted as just, but also

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<sup>105</sup> See Raith, *After Merit*, 145.

<sup>106</sup> See *Inst.* 2.3.11 (1539), *OS* 3:287; Raith, *After Merit*, 144.

<sup>107</sup> *BLW* 152, *COR* IV/III:227; cf. Augustine, *Grace and Free Choice* 6.14, in *NPNF* 5:449.

<sup>108</sup> *BLW* 153, *COR* IV/III:228; cf. Augustine, Letter 194.5.19, in *The Works of Saint Augustine* II/3, *Letters 156-210*, trans. Roland Teske, S.J., ed. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park: New York City Press, 2004). Lane, *COR* IV/III:228n.138, observes that an overlapping but shorter and looser quotation also occurs in *Inst.* 3.15.7 (1539), *OS* 4:246.

<sup>109</sup> *BLW* 235, *COR* IV/III:318.

<sup>110</sup> See *Inst.* 2.3.11 (1539), *OS* 3:287.

<sup>111</sup> *Comm.* Ezek. 18:5-9, *CO* 40:425.

because they *are made just* by the Spirit: “God promises that this third person [i.e., the one who lives according to God’s law] shall be acceptable by him, *because he is just*, and therefore enjoys prosperity and happiness.”<sup>112</sup> The faithful are acceptable to God and rewarded by him on account of their righteous living. Rewards as well as the secondary mode of acceptance, therefore, are based on double justification and the *duplex gratia*. Granted, Calvin’s concept of double justification assumes the twofold grace, for believers can perform spiritually good works only if they have been justified *and regenerated*. Thus, God rewards believers’ works because *they themselves* are righteous, though relatively.

As we continue reading Calvin’s remarks on Ezekiel 18, we find a curious admission: as is “the Spirit’s intention,” this reward is prepared “according to their lives.” Here, it would seem Calvin contradicts his earlier teaching, stating now that reward *is* congruent with the worth of believers’ works. This is not the case. Calvin explains several lines later what it means to be just, according to Ezekiel: to withdraw from iniquity and desire our neighbors’ wellbeing.<sup>113</sup> Again, such justice is not perfect obedience but relative holiness; the works-righteousness of believers is “mutilated,” or imperfect.<sup>114</sup> And later, Calvin states that “a recompense is prepared for all the just who thus *sincerely worship God*.”<sup>115</sup> Thus, believers are rewarded because they serve and obey God from a genuine love for him and their neighbors. Moreover, when Calvin states that believers are rewarded “according to their lives,” he is not stating that the reward *itself* corresponds with the inherent worth of their deeds, but that believers are rewarded because they actually perform righteous deeds—which is due to God’s grace, not human merit.

Calvin’s concept of reward, therefore, includes both participatory and non-participatory elements.<sup>116</sup> God rewards believers because they participate in his activity. The works that God accepts and rewards originate from him. Yet God rewards good works by overlooking their imperfections—and the imperfect participation of believers—and by ascribing worth that does not correspond to their inherent value. It is in this sense that Calvin’s theology of reward is non-participatory. Commenting on a

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<sup>112</sup> *Comm. Ezek. 18:5-9, CO 40:426*. The context of this passage shows that Calvin does not mean “is just” simply in that one is considered just situationally *coram Deo*, but in that one is just experientially because he “does justice and judgment.”

<sup>113</sup> See *Comm. Ezek. 18:5-9, CO 40:426*.

<sup>114</sup> *Comm. Ezek. 18:14-17, CO 40:438*.

<sup>115</sup> *Comm. Ezek. 2:230, CO 40:433*.

<sup>116</sup> Raith, *After Merit*, 145.



remark that Calvin makes in *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*—“God reduces all our goodness to nothing by attributing every portion of our good works to himself and his grace”<sup>117</sup>—Raith explains that Calvin “denounces the human actor’s role in the work-reward schematic by appealing to God’s grace *over against* the good works produced in the believer due to God’s indwelling Spirit.”<sup>118</sup> Raith’s choice of language (i.e., “denounces”) is extreme—for Calvin clearly affirms, both in this specific work and elsewhere, the activity of believers in expounding his concept of reward<sup>119</sup>—and his overall point is somewhat amiss. Certainly, Calvin emphasizes God’s grace, which is the ultimate reason for reward, but his emphasis on the grace of pardon does not oppose God’s sanctifying grace in the believer. Calvin emphasizes God’s grace contra human merit, or any goodness *of ourselves*, so that believers may understand that all the good they receive—both the good works granted to them by God and the reward for those works—originates from grace. Calvin’s aim, therefore, is to emphasize (1) God as the source and inspiration of good works and (2) God’s liberality in rewarding such works. Nevertheless, this does not prevent Calvin from teaching that “the good works *of believers* are reasons why the Lord benefits them.”<sup>120</sup>

#### 4.5. Good Works and Eschatological Salvation

In *Institutio* 3.14.21, Calvin explains the cause of salvation, employing fourfold causality: “the efficient cause of our salvation consists in God the Father’s love; the material cause in God the Son’s obedience; the instrumental cause in the Spirit’s illumination, that is, faith; the final cause, in the glory of God’s great generosity.” He then asserts that good works are “inferior causes,” means whereby God leads believers into eternal life:

Those whom the Lord has destined by his mercy for the inheritance of eternal life he leads into possession of it, according to his ordinary dispensation, by means of good works. What goes before in the order of dispensation [i.e., good works] he calls the cause of what comes after [i.e., eternal life]. In this way he sometimes derives eternal life from works, not intending it to be ascribed to them but because he justifies those whom he has chosen in order at last to glorify them [Rom. 8:30], he makes the prior grace [i.e., good works], which is a step to that which follows [i.e., eternal life], as it were the cause. But whenever the true

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<sup>117</sup> *BLW* 138, *COR* IV/III:212.

<sup>118</sup> Raith, *After Merit*, 145 (emphasis original).

<sup>119</sup> E.g., our discussion of *BLW* and *Comm.* Ezek. 18 above in this section.

<sup>120</sup> See *Inst.* 3.14.21 (1539), *OS* 4:238.

cause is to be assigned, he does not enjoin us to take refuge in works but keeps us solely to the contemplation of his mercy.<sup>121</sup>

As in his positive formulation of justification by works, we find here that Calvin ascribes a causal role to works, rightly understood. The reason they are ascribed causal value is that God has chosen to use them in the *ordo salutis* outlined by Paul: they are the means whereby the “possession” of eternal life is obtained.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, because good works precede eschatological salvation, they are said to be a sort of cause. The ultimate or true cause is God alone, since he has elected, called, justified, and glorified believers. Nevertheless, good works are considered a subordinate or inferior cause of salvation because they play a vital role in the *ordo salutis*. They are “indispensable to the ongoing restoration of the divine image in believers and their ultimate salvation,” as Garcia remarks.<sup>123</sup> Calvin even describes good works as a *gradus* by which believers move from one point in the *ordo* to another. Hunsinger questions whether Calvin should have claimed that good works are a cause of eschatological salvation, implying that it is uncharacteristic of Calvin’s overall thought.<sup>124</sup> This, however, is not the only instance in which Calvin teaches that good works are a cause, in a certain manner, of eternal life. As we journey through *Institutio* book 3 and consider his commentaries, we find similar passages that elucidate his statement here.

In the next chapter, Calvin states, “Whatever, therefore, is now given to the godly as an aid to salvation, even blessedness [*beatitudo*] itself, is purely God’s beneficence. Yet both in this blessedness and in those godly persons, he testifies that he takes works into account. For in order to testify to the greatness of his love toward us, he makes not only us but the gift that he has given us worthy of such honor.”<sup>125</sup> God is the originator of our works, which function as a basis for divine blessing and helps. Additionally, these helps promote our salvation. This would seem to contradict what Calvin states elsewhere, that works cannot aid in salvation.<sup>126</sup> What Calvin is combating in those instances is the notion that works meritoriously aid salvation or help to acquire justification—or that humans *of themselves* can work alongside God to accomplish

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<sup>121</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.21 (1539), *OS* 4:238-239.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. *Comm.* Rom. 8:30, *COR II/XIII*:177-179, wherein Calvin states that our sufferings prepare us for God’s eternal kingdom. On the similarities between *Inst.* 3.14.21 and Calvin’s *Comm.* Rom. 8:30, see Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 108-113.

<sup>123</sup> Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 111.

<sup>124</sup> Hunsinger, “Two Simultaneities,” 322.

<sup>125</sup> *Inst.* 3.15.4 (Beveridge) (1539), *OS* 4:243.

<sup>126</sup> See *Inst.* 3.4.25 (mainly 1536, 1539), *OS* 4:113-114; *Inst.* 3.11.18 (1539), *OS* 4:202; *Inst.* 3.17.3 (1539), *OS* 4:256; *Inst.* 3.17.8 (1539), *OS* 4:261.

something he does not. And it is clear from the immediate context of 3.15.4—and from Calvin’s use of *beatitudo* throughout the *Institutio*—that the “blessedness” referred to here is eschatological salvation.<sup>127</sup> The good works that God grants us are reasons why he blesses us with helps to advance in the Christian life and gives us the ultimate blessing of eternal life.

Several chapters later, Calvin explains that when Scripture teaches that “‘the Lord keeps covenant of mercy with those who love him,’ [cf. Deut. 7:9; I Kings 8:23; Neh. 1:5] this indicates what kind of servants they are who have undertaken his covenant in good faith rather than express the reason why the Lord benefits them.”<sup>128</sup> Calvin again asserts that God adopts us as children and “gives us the grace of eternal life” *so that* he would be worshiped and glorified. If we wish to prove ourselves true children, “we must ever strive in the direction of our call.”<sup>129</sup> Therefore, Calvin explains, whenever we read in Scripture that God “does good to those who keep his law,” we should remember the *goal* for which he has bound us to himself. While God indeed promises to reward our personal righteousness with eternal life, we should live uprightly ultimately because we “reverence him as our Father.” Calvin directs readers’ attention away from their own works and to God and his goodness and mercy. Further, “Let us keep in mind that the fulfillment of the Lord’s mercy does not depend upon believers’ works but that he fulfils the promise of salvation for those *who respond to his call with an upright life*, because in those who are directed to the good by his Spirit he recognizes the only genuine insignia of his children.”<sup>130</sup> God is the primary agent in bringing about the promise of eternal salvation to believers. Right conduct, therefore, is not the *cause* of God’s blessing, though it is a *mark* of a true believer. And while Calvin states that the completion of God’s work does not depend on believers’ works, he insists that God mercifully fulfills his promise to those who conduct themselves aright by the Spirit. While holy living is not the principal reason that God brings believers into his eternal kingdom, it is nevertheless a prerequisite since God fulfills his promise to those

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<sup>127</sup> Not all instances of *beatitudo* in the *Institutio* refer to eschatological salvation, yet Calvin frequently uses the term in reference to that reality or a condition characteristic of it. He even uses *beatitudo* to refer to the reward promised to observers of the law, which is given graciously to believers, who live according to it only relatively. E.g., *Inst.* 2.2.13 (1539), *OS* 3:256; *Inst.* 2.2.26 (1559), *OS* 3:269; *Inst.* 2.7.4 (1539), *OS* 3:330; *Inst.* 2.8.4 (1539), *OS* 3:346; *Inst.* 2.8.14 (1539), *OS* 3:355; *Inst.* 2.10.14 (1539), *OS* 3:415; *Inst.* 2.15.4 (1559), *OS* 3:476; *Inst.* 3.17.1 (1539), *OS* 4:253; *Inst.* 3.18.2 (1539), *OS* 4:271; *Inst.* 3.18.4 (1536), *OS* 4:274; *Inst.* 3.18.6 (1539), *OS* 4:276; *Inst.* 3.25.1 (1559), *OS* 4:433; *Inst.* 3.25.11 (1559), *OS* 4:454.

<sup>128</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.6 (1539), *OS* 4:258.

<sup>129</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.6 (1539), *OS* 4:258-259.

<sup>130</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.6 (1539), *OS* 4:259.

who live righteously. How is this so? Because only those who honor God as father by striving to live in accordance with his law are true children.

Later in book 3, Calvin again draws from the Pauline *ordo* to explain how works relate to the possession of eternal life. After quoting Romans 8:30, Calvin states that God “leads [believers] into possession of [eternal life] through the race of good works in order to fulfill his own work in them *according to the order* that he has laid down.” Moreover, believers are “said to be crowned according to their own works, by which they are doubtless prepared to receive the crown of immortality.”<sup>131</sup> Calvin also states that believers’ “uprightness, albeit partial and imperfect, is a step toward immortality.”<sup>132</sup> Again, we see that good works are integral to the *ordo salutis*: while works are not the ultimate cause of salvation, they nevertheless are the manner through which believers are led into eschatological glory, a step from one stage in the *ordo* to another. Commenting on “the statement that ‘God will render to every man according to his works’ [Rom. 2:6],” Calvin explains that it “indicates an order of sequence rather than the cause.” Calvin is not abrogating his former statement that works are inferior causes of salvation, but is reinforcing the notion that the reward of eternal life follows the grace of good works. Works may still be considered a cause of salvation, because they precede eternal life in “the order that [God] has laid down,”<sup>133</sup> but the ultimate or “true cause” of salvation, as Calvin states in 3.14.21, is assigned to God and his mercy. He is the one who not only justifies and regenerates believers but also “leads them into possession of [eternal life] through the race of good works in order to fulfill his own work in them.”

It is imperative to recognize that Calvin distinguishes between the *beginning* of salvation and its *consummation*.<sup>134</sup> Undoubtedly, God alone is the author of salvation, from beginning to end.<sup>135</sup> Calvin writes, “Once [believers] are, by knowledge of the gospel and illumination of the Holy Spirit, called into the fellowship of Christ, eternal life begins in them. Now that God has begun a good work in them, it must also be made perfect until the Day of the Lord Jesus [Phil. 1:6].” This does not mean, however, that the believer’s activity, which Calvin speaks of frequently in his discussions of one’s entrance into the celestial kingdom, is opposed to grace. By God’s grace, salvation is

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<sup>131</sup> *Inst.* 3.18.1 (1539), *OS* 4:270.

<sup>132</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.15 (1539), *OS* 4:269.

<sup>133</sup> *Inst.* 3.18.1 (1539), *OS* 4:270.

<sup>134</sup> See Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 113.

<sup>135</sup> See *Inst.* 3.22.6 (1539, 1559), *OS* 4:385-386; Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 250.

completed “when in righteousness and holiness they bear a resemblance to their heavenly Father, and prove that they are not degenerate sons.”<sup>136</sup> Garcia helpfully explains, “The chronology is especially important: the ‘completion’ of the work ‘begun’ in us by God is realized only later at glorification, i.e., when sanctification is completed, when grace becomes glory. That is to say, it is *after* the work begun in us by God has reached its perfection in glorification that believers are ‘proved’ to be adopted sons of God.”<sup>137</sup> And this completion and vindication does not occur apart from believers’ own activity; Calvin states that *believers* are the ones doing the proving and resembling. It is in this sense that believers work out their salvation (Phil. 2:12).<sup>138</sup>

Calvin also distinguishes between the *inheritance* of eternal life and *full possession* of it.<sup>139</sup> Commenting on Philippians 3:12, Calvin teaches that we possess eternal life only *in part* now. Certainly, “so soon as we are by faith engrafted into the body of Christ, we have already entered the Kingdom of God; and, as it says in Eph. 2.6, we already, through hope, sit in heavenly places.”<sup>140</sup> Yet until we actually sit in the heavenly places, and not just “through hope,” our salvation is best described as a secure inheritance rather than a possession. Calvin then states that Paul sees mortification—and suffering with Christ, in particular—as the path to attaining the resurrection, the full possession of salvation or “the completion of redemption.”<sup>141</sup> We recall from our discussion of good works and growth in holiness that Calvin ascribes a causal role to believers in the process of mortification. According to Calvin, Paul teaches that “we must make progress, and that the knowledge of Christ is so difficult, that even those who strive after it alone are nevertheless perfect, so long as they live.”<sup>142</sup> Even though believers will never attain perfection in this life, they are nevertheless charged to advance in the Christian life by mortifying their flesh, by being conformed to Christ in

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<sup>136</sup> *Inst.* 3.18.1 (Beveridge) (1539), *OS* 4:271.

<sup>137</sup> Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 113. Cf. Lane, “Calvin and Article 5,” 257, who states that for Calvin as well as Bucer, “*eternal salvation* involves some activity of on the part of the human [free] will and some performing of good works. . . . Calvin did not reject the idea of cooperation with grace if this is understood in an Augustinian sense (*Inst.* 2:3:11-13)” (emphasis original).

<sup>138</sup> *Inst.* 3.18.1 (mainly 1539), *OS* 4:270-271.

<sup>139</sup> See Raith, *After Merit*, 157-169, who demonstrates that, for Calvin, eternal life both *is* and *is not* obtained through works. Cf. Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 287-288, who states that works are a way of progressing toward the “‘ownership’ of our calling,” or the “fulfillment of the promise in our flesh-and-spirit redemption.”

<sup>140</sup> *Comm.* Phil. 3:12, *CO* 52:51.

<sup>141</sup> *Comm.* Phil. 3:10, *CO* 52:50. Cf. *Inst.* 3.8.1 (1539), *OS* 4:162.

<sup>142</sup> *Comm.* Phil. 3:12, *CO* 52:51.

his suffering. And Calvin sees mortification as the way by which believers come to enjoy Christ fully. In dying with Christ, which requires “our earnest endeavour” and “struggle against so many and such serious hindrances,” we attain his resurrection and “everlasting blessedness.”<sup>143</sup> However, the apostle offers a qualifier, Calvin explains. Paul inserts “as also I have been apprehended” by way of correction, “that he might ascribe all his [efforts] to the grace of God.”<sup>144</sup> The reason Paul was apprehended by Christ is “that he might apprehend Christ; that is, that he did nothing save by Christ’s influence and guidance.”<sup>145</sup> All our endeavors and success are ascribed fully to God, who alone inspires and strengthens us to heed his call.

Elsewhere, Calvin explains that while holy living never “gives *access* to the glory of the Heavenly Kingdom,” it is a way “by which those chosen by their God are led to its *disclosure*. For it is God’s pleasure to glorify those whom he has sanctified [Rom. 8:30].”<sup>146</sup> Calvin again invokes the Pauline *ordo*, arguing that works are a means whereby believers are led into God’s celestial kingdom. Calvin also distinguishes access to the “glory” of God’s kingdom from the manifestation of that kingdom. Put another way, we taste eternal life now, though we do not yet fully enjoy it. And Calvin again nuances his statements by rejecting the notion that eternal life is paid as a due to believers or that it corresponds equally to the worth of their works. As he so often does, Calvin emphasizes the primacy of God’s activity in leading believers into eternal life. He also calls eternal life the “presentation or fruition, so to speak, of the things which [God] has promised,” stating additionally that good works “bring us to the ripeness of that fruit.”<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> *Comm. Phil.* 3:10, *CO* 52:50. Cf. *Comm.* 1 Tim. 6:12, *CO* 52:328-329, wherein Calvin also connects mortification to the obtainment of eschatological salvation.

<sup>144</sup> *Comm. Phil.* 3:12, *CO* 52:51. The translator renders *conatum* as “virtues,” which I have replaced with “efforts.”

<sup>145</sup> *Comm. Phil.* 3:12, *CO* 52:51.

<sup>146</sup> *Inst.* 3.18.4 (1536), *OS* 4:274.

<sup>147</sup> *Inst.* 3.18.3 (1539), *OS* 4:272. Bucer, in his Romans commentary, also ascribes a positive role to works in relation to eschatological salvation. In harmonizing 2:13 and 3:20, he even identifies a *triplex iustificatio*—that is, “God assigns eternal life to us in three ways” (Lugioyo, *Bucer’s Doctrine of Justification*, 224, *B.Rom.* 119). The first is God’s eternal election; the second is the revelation and granting of eternal life, in some measure, in the present life of the believer; the third is full revelation of eternal life in the eschaton. It is this last “justification” to which our deeds, which are no less than divine gifts, contribute. God, whom Bucer is clear to identify as the primary cause of salvation, takes into account believers works when he accepts them into eternal fellowship. Works serve only as a secondary cause for the reward of eternal life (see Lugioyo, *Bucer’s Doctrine of Justification*, 94-100). Cf. David C. Fink, “‘The Doers of the Law Will Be Justified’: The Exegetical Origins of Martine Bucer’s *Triples Iustificatio*,” *JST* 58.2 (October 2007): 485-524; Stephens, *Holy Spirit*, 52-53. Bucer

We find further evidence of human agency in attaining the full possession of eternal life in Calvin's commentary on 2 Peter 1. Commenting on verse 4, Calvin states that the apostle sets before us the glory of heaven, showing that "the image of God in holiness and righteousness is reborn to us on the condition of our sharing in eternal life and glory, so far as is necessary for complete blessedness [*beatitudinem*]." <sup>148</sup> Again, the restoration of God's image in us is not accomplished apart from our own activity. God does not treat us as inert blocks but as "animate and living tools." <sup>149</sup> By mortification, an ongoing act that is truly considered our activity though chiefly the Spirit's, we become more Christ-like. And Calvin states that Peter's design here is twofold: "to set before us the worth of the heavenly glory to which God invites us, and thereby to wean us away from the vanity of this present world." <sup>150</sup> Commenting on the next verse, Calvin stresses the activity required on our part, stating that mortification involves "immense labour." Therefore, the apostle bids us to "put off the corruption that is in us, and strive earnestly to this purpose" and assigns us "the work of supplying virtue." <sup>151</sup> Moral progress not only proves that we are Christ's <sup>152</sup> but also leads us into eternal life. It is clear from the context of Calvin's 2 Peter 1 commentary that as the endowments (e.g., virtue, knowledge, etc.) increase within us, our flesh is mortified, and righteousness and holiness (the chief part of God's image) are increasingly restored in us. And the goal of this restoration is that we may partake of eternal life and glory.

In the middle of his exposition of 2 Peter 1, Calvin questions whether "the task of supplying virtue" results from "the force and power of free-will." Consistent with his teaching elsewhere, he explains that, according to Scripture, "proper feelings are formed in us by God, and made effective by him." God is the reason we desire, pursue, and perform righteousness. Thus, while Peter shows what is required of us, he "is by no means maintaining that they are possible for us"—that is, possible for us *in se*—because "prudence, charity and patience are the gifts of God's Spirit." "Our progress and

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relays a different *triplex iustificatio* or *tria genera* of justification in *De Vera Ecclesiarum in Doctrina, ceremoniis, Et Disciplina reconciliation et compositione* (1543), 172b-173a: the first is the remission of sins, God's grace, and communion with the Father and Son; the second is the gift of personal righteousness, new life; the third is the approval and remuneration of our good deeds (cf. Lugioyo, *Bucer's Doctrine of Justification*, 98n.93).

<sup>148</sup> *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:4, *COR* II/XX:328.

<sup>149</sup> *BLW* 152, *COR* IV/III:228. Cf. "3.1. Personal Righteousness."

<sup>150</sup> *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:4, *COR* II/XX:328-329.

<sup>151</sup> *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:5, *COR* II/XX:329.

<sup>152</sup> *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:8, *COR* II/XX:330.

perseverance are from God alone,” not ourselves.<sup>153</sup> Yet this does not prevent Calvin from affirming human agency in God’s act to save his elect.

This is also evinced in Calvin’s commentary on 1 Timothy 4, wherein he states that a pastor’s faithfulness leads to immortality. Commenting on 4:16, Calvin explains that the young leader is taught two things that a good pastor must care about: to guard his teaching and keep himself pure. If Timothy should do these, he will save both himself and his hearers. Calvin explains that the concern of pastors will increase when they hear that “both their own salvation and that of their people depends upon their serious and earnest devotion to their office.”<sup>154</sup> Readers should not think it seems strange “that Paul ascribes to Timothy the work of saving the Church, for all that are won for God are saved and it is by the preaching of the Gospel that we are gathered to Christ. And just as the unfaithfulness or negligence of a pastor is fatal to the Church, *so it is right for [the cause of] salvation to be ascribed to his faithfulness and diligence.*”<sup>155</sup> Calvin then asserts that this exhortation “applies to the whole body of the Church, not to be weary of that simplicity which both quickens souls to life and preserves them in health.” Calvin again ascribes a causal role to believers in salvation—both their own and that of others. Yet he directs his readers to the ultimate cause: “it is God alone who saves and not even the smallest part of His glory can rightly be transferred to men.” Our salvation is “the gift of God, since it comes from Him alone and is effected only by his power.” Yet Calvin also acknowledges that God uses “the labour of men in bestowing salvation.” Further, the ministry of men does not interfere with God’s work; when God ascribes agency to ministers, his “glory is in no way diminished.” God is the primary cause of salvation, yet the work of believers—specifically that of pastors—is an inferior cause or the means whereby the salvation promised in the gospel comes to sinners. Additionally, because God is the one “who makes men good pastors and leads them by His Spirit and blesses their work so that it may not be in vain,” the salvation of the church “is entirely God’s work.”<sup>156</sup> And to understand this teaching more fully, readers

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<sup>153</sup> *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:5, *COR II/XX*:330. We recall from “2.3. Humanity in Christ” that while believers are able to pursue what is good and cooperate with God, they cannot do so in their own strength, but are enabled by God’s efficacious grace.

<sup>154</sup> *Comm.* 1 Tim. 4:16, *CO* 52:303.

<sup>155</sup> *Comm.* 1 Tim. 4:16, *CO* 52:304. The translator renders “*salutis causa*” simply as “salvation.” I have altered his translation to more accurately reflect Calvin’s words.

<sup>156</sup> *Comm.* 1 Tim. 4:16, *CO* 52:304. Our study again confirms what is argued by Raith, *After Merit*, 69-74, 111-115: Calvin adheres to a non-competitive understanding of divine-human activity.



are directed by Calvin to his commentary on Philippians 2:12, which we discussed earlier.

#### 4.6. Conclusion

We have discovered further evidence that Calvin holds a positive notion of works-righteousness. According to him, good works are intimately connected to the promotion of personal holiness and righteousness; are a means whereby believers fellowship with God, the righteous one; give believers confidence that they are righteous, both situationally and experientially; are a basis for rewards, which are given only to cultivators of righteousness; and are a means whereby believers come into full possession of eternal life, which is the promised reward for those who live righteously.

In this chapter, we have further highlighted Calvin's understanding of divine-human causality. Believers truly have agency in the Christian life, and God uses their activity in various stages of the *ordo salutis* as means of accomplishing his purposes for them. Contra Margret Miles, Calvin indeed teaches that there is something for believers to do and be.<sup>157</sup> Yet God is the one who forms us, guides us by his Spirit, and blesses our labor so that our works are effectual.<sup>158</sup> Whatever role we play is ascribed ultimately to God, who efficaciously animates us so we may participate in his activity. Just as prelapsarian humans were to refer all their gifts and powers to God, so are Christians. Moreover, Calvin stresses that in the production of good works, God is the primary agent and believers are secondary agents. Our study, therefore, confirms again what Raith has argued—that Calvin embraces a non-competitive causality in which both God and believers act simultaneously.<sup>159</sup>

This truth alone, however, does not sufficiently account for the soteriological value that Calvin ascribes to works. Even though the regenerate are able to perform righteous deeds by participating in the divine reality, their participation is imperfect due to the residual sin in their lives. Not until the resurrection will believers enjoy freedom from sin.<sup>160</sup> Therefore, any value ascribed to believers' works is in consequence of God's mercy. God embraces the works of believers, whom he has "received into the

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<sup>157</sup> See Miles, "Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body," 305.

<sup>158</sup> See *Comm.* 1 Tim 4:16, which was discussed in "4.5. Good Works and Eschatological Salvation."

<sup>159</sup> See Raith, *After Merit*, 69-74, 111-115.

<sup>160</sup> See *BLW* 240-241, *COR* IV/III:325.

covenant of grace,” with his fatherly kindness.<sup>161</sup> As a gracious, loving Father and not a strict Judge, God overlooks the imperfections in our works and embraces them “in Christ rather than in themselves.”<sup>162</sup> Moreover, in his “fatherly generosity and loving-kindness,” he estimates our works not according to “their worth” and instead “raises works to [a] place of honor, so that he attributes some value to them.”<sup>163</sup> The soteriological value of good works, therefore, ultimately comes from God’s paternal love and mercy.

In no way, therefore, should one conclude from the analyses in this chapter that Calvin’s teaching on the Christian life is anthropocentric. Our study reinforces the resolutely theocentric nature of Calvin’s soteriology. God is the ultimate cause of salvation, its author from beginning to end. Yet this does not prevent Calvin from ascribing agency to believers in various stages in the *ordo salutis*. Even though believers act voluntarily, in an Augustinian sense, they are to refer all their endeavors and success to God alone, who has given them natural and supernal gifts to love and obey him.

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<sup>161</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.15 (1539), *OS* 4:269.

<sup>162</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.5 (1539), *OS* 4:258. Cf. *Antidote* in *Tracts* 3:146, *CO* 7:472 wherein Calvin states that God accepts our works “when works acknowledged to have no value in themselves borrow, and, as it were, beg their value from Christ.”

<sup>163</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.3 (1539), *OS* 4:256.

## Chapter 5

### The Content of Good Works

Having established the fundamental elements of Calvin's positive notion of works-righteousness, we will now explore the works by which one is considered righteous once faith-righteousness is already established. Stated differently, we will discuss the content of good works.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, it is impossible to retrieve and relay in one chapter everything Calvin means by "good works." This chapter, therefore, summarizes generally the content of good works in his thought. Further, due to the limitations of scope, this chapter will focus on those works that take priority in terms of significance and frequency in his *corpus*. We will (1) establish that Calvin understands good works in a broad sense, particularly as obedience to God's law.<sup>2</sup> This obedience consists of love for God and neighbor, the two headings of the Christian life that correlate to the two tables of the law. We will then discuss the chief duties of (2) loving God and (3) loving others. Finally, we will explore (4) the disposition of heart from which works must flow if they are to be considered righteous. Cumulatively, these analyses will identify works that Calvin believes are deemed righteous or good.

#### 5.1. Good Works as Law-Keeping

Calvin understands good works in a broad sense—they are not limited to certain cultic activities—and particularly as obedience to God's law.<sup>3</sup> Expounding Ezekiel 18:14-17, for example, he speaks frequently of the works that either prove one righteous or unrighteous, and all these statements are made in reference to law-keeping. Commenting on 18:20, he speaks of "works" when explaining the "righteousness of the

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<sup>1</sup> Here, I imitate what Raith, *After Merit*, chapter 7, has done. After establishing Calvin's general understanding of rewards, he explores the content of rewards.

While many studies explore Calvin's teaching on particular aspects of the Christian life (charity, prayer, baptism, etc.), I have not discovered any extensive analysis of what Calvin means by "good works."

<sup>2</sup> Calvin's understanding of "law" is complex, and it is outside the scope here to discuss his multifaceted understanding of the law (natural law, the Mosaic Law, law and gospel, political law, etc.). When speaking of Calvin's understanding of the law in relation to good works, I will limit my focus to the Moral Law.

<sup>3</sup> Billings, *Calvin*, 144-185; Lillback, *Binding of God*, 185-193; and Schreiner, "John Calvin," 129-131, indicate that Calvin understands good works as obedience to God's law, though without explicitly stating so.

righteous” and equates “the righteousness of the law” with the “works” that God remunerates.<sup>4</sup> Here, good works are a way of describing law-keeping.

Calvin also equates “good works” with (imperfect) law-keeping in a sermon on Deuteronomy 6:1-4. In discussing “works” that God rewards, Calvin states that “none of us keeps the law as it ought to be kept” and that God would be justified if he cursed us rather than blessed us. “Therefore,” Calvin exclaims, “it is entirely inappropriate for men to boast of obtaining any renewal which they have earned, or of glorifying in their works.” Later, he states that although no one “has fulfilled the law,”<sup>5</sup> God has “received our works, not really considering their substance, but accepting them as good and holy” because of Christ.<sup>6</sup> Again, Calvin uses “good works” in reference to law-keeping, even if it be imperfect.

Elsewhere, Calvin relates “good works” to more specific concepts like *faith*, *integrity*, *love*, and *righteousness*, which he often uses in reference to the two tables of the Decalogue. Commenting on Psalm 18:20, Calvin speaks of “integrity,” “obedience,” and “works,” when referring to the righteousness that God rewards.<sup>7</sup> Calvin relates *iustitia* not only to good works, but also to *obsequium* and *integritas*, the latter of which he occasionally uses when referencing the second table.<sup>8</sup> Expositing 2 Peter 1:10, Calvin mentions that some biblical manuscripts add “by good works” after “give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure.” Though unnecessary, Calvin explains, this insertion “makes no alteration in the sense, because it is to be understood even if it is not specifically expressed.” As the context shows, Calvin understands “an upright life [*vitae integritas*]” to be that which confirms one’s election.<sup>9</sup> “Good works” are equated with *integritas*. Moreover, commenting on Hosea 6:6-7, Calvin states that *fides* and *caritas* are “of the class of good works [*genere bonorum*].”<sup>10</sup>

Calvin understands good works in a broad sense and thus offers a teaching similar to Luther’s 1520 *Treatise on Good Works*. Therein, Luther critiques those who “define good works so narrowly that they are made to consist only of praying in church,

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<sup>4</sup> *Comm.* Ezek. 18:20, *CO* 40:443.

<sup>5</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 297, *CO* 26:425

<sup>6</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 298, *CO* 26:425.

<sup>7</sup> *Comm.* Ps. 18:20, *CO* 31:180.

<sup>8</sup> See *Comm.* Amos 5:15, *CO* 43:86; Elsie Anne McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984), 238,253.

<sup>9</sup> *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:10, *COR* II/XX:332.

<sup>10</sup> *Comm.* Hos. 6:6-7, *CO* 42:330.

fasting, and almsgiving” and who do not believe that God “is served by all things that may be done, spoken, or thought in faith.”<sup>11</sup> Even though Luther understands good works broadly, he teaches that we must look only to God’s commandments to learn what good works are.<sup>12</sup>

Calvin thinks similarly. In *Institutio* 2.8.5, he laments humanity’s perpetual inclination to earn God’s favor with no warrant from God’s Word. He then states that these superfluous observances are “generally regarded as good works” and are barely informed by God’s precepts. Calvin may have in mind certain Catholic practices like works of satisfaction, the five false sacraments, and other religious deeds that supposedly procured God’s favor, all of which he refutes later in the *Institutio*. Yet toward the end of this section, Calvin speaks collectively, referring to all humanity: “we labour prodigiously in feigning and coining an endless variety of good works.”<sup>13</sup> Mentioning “good works” negatively here, Calvin is referring generally to human inventions. This, however, does not negate the possibility that he also has specific Catholic practices in view.<sup>14</sup> What is certain: to learn what good works truly are, believers must look only to God’s law, which perfectly sets forth “holiness of life.”<sup>15</sup> Calvin also argues that it is erroneous “to believe that the law teaches nothing but some rudiments and preliminaries of righteousness by which men begin their apprenticeship, and also does not also guide them to the true goal, good works, since you cannot desire a greater perfection than that expressed in the statements of Moses and Paul.”<sup>16</sup> Calvin not only relates good works to *iustitia*, a term he occasionally equates with the whole law and not just the second table,<sup>17</sup> but also rejects the notion that the law is an

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<sup>11</sup> *Treatise on Good Works* in LW 44:24, WA 6:205.

<sup>12</sup> *Treatise on Good Works* in LW 44:23, WA 6:204. Luther’s treatise expounds the Decalogue. While Luther may not have held a formal third use of the law, he nevertheless saw the Decalogue as instructive for Christians. Cf. his treatments of the Decalogue in *The Small Catechism* (1529) and *The Larger Catechism* (1529). See Kolb and Trueman, *Between Wittenberg and Geneva*, 41-43, on the positive instruction of the law for Luther.

Melanchthon, *Romans* 36, CR 15:522, also teaches that the good works commanded by God are presented in the Decalogue. Zwingli, *Sixty-Seven Articles*, Article 24 in RC 1:5, Niemeyer 6-7; *Fidei Expositio* in RC 1:202, Niemeyer 57, teaches a similar idea.

<sup>13</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.5 (Beveridge) (1539), OS 3:347.

<sup>14</sup> In his sermons on the Decalogue, Calvin frequently accuses the papists of adding to God’s Word by devising superstitions. E.g., *Serm. Ten Commandments* 243,294, CO 26:388,422-423.

<sup>15</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.51 (1539), OS 3:390.

<sup>16</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.51 (1539), OS 3:390-391.

<sup>17</sup> E.g., *Inst.* 2.7.13 (1539), OS 3:339; 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:69, OS 2:112; *Comm.* Deut. 10:12, CO 24:721; *Comm.* Ps. 119:142, CO 32:279; *Comm.* Ezek. 18:8, CO 40:430.

introduction to good works, as if the law were merely the first step toward good works. Rather, the law guides us in performing good works. Good works are not distinct from or additional to the law. This is why Calvin rejects supererogatory works, which God “never either commanded or approves, nor will he accept them when account of them is to be rendered before him.”<sup>18</sup> According to Calvin, we cannot perform any unrequired works because God requires more than we could ever perform, and all that we could perform is only due service to him. We can contribute nothing to honoring God or loving neighbor “that is not comprised within God’s law.”<sup>19</sup>

The broader context of *Institutio* 2.8.51 shows that “greater perfection” is love for God and neighbor, the two distinct yet inseparable heads of the law:

First, indeed, our soul should be entirely filled with the love of God [*Dei dilectione*]. From this will flow directly the love of neighbor [*proximi dilectio*]. This is what the Apostle shows when he writes that “the aim of the law is love [*charitatem*] from a pure conscience, and of faith unfeigned” [1 Tim. 1:5]. You see how conscience and sincere faith are put at the head. In other words, here is true piety, from which love [*charitatem*] is derived.<sup>20</sup>

Calvin equates heartfelt love for God with *fides* and *pietas*. Law-keeping is no coldhearted service toward God that springs from a mere sense of duty. Rather, obedience that pleases God flows from genuine love for him. And love for God is the source of neighborly love.<sup>21</sup> And after discussing the twofold love required by the law, Calvin immediately discusses the law as a guide to good works. Good works are equated with love for God and neighbor, which are the essence of the law.

Consequently, it is imperative to explore Calvin’s understanding of the Moral Law. This is also necessary given that Calvin frequently refers to good works with specific terms like *pietas*, *sanctitas*, *iustitia*, and *caritas*, which he also uses in reference

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Elsewhere, Calvin refers to the entire law as “the rule of piety” (*Comm.* Deut. 31:10, *CO* 24:230) and as “everything pertaining to absolute holiness” (*Comm.* Gen. 26:5, *CO* 23:359).

<sup>18</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.15 (1536), *OS* 4:234.

<sup>19</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.14 (1539), *OS* 4:233. Cf. *Inst.* 2.8.56 (1536,1539), *OS* 3:394, wherein Calvin rejects the distinction between counsels and precepts, stating that God’s law is eternal and binding on all people. Though not commenting on Calvin’s rejection of supererogatory works per se, Guenther H. Haas, “Calvin’s Ethics,” in *CCJC*, 98, rightly states, “The law revealed [in Scripture] is sufficient for human life, omitting nothing that is necessary and useful.” Cf. Melancthon, *CTT* 124, *CR* 21:719-720.

<sup>20</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.51 (mainly 1539), *OS* 3:390. Cf. *Inst.* 2.8.54 (mainly 1536,1539), *OS* 3:392-393; *Comm.* Hos. 6:6-7, *CO* 42:329-330, wherein Calvin states that faith “cannot even exist without love to our neighbour.” While Calvin sometimes uses *dilectio* and more infrequently *amor* to refer to love for neighbor, he more often uses *caritas*. In some instances, like *Inst.* 2.8.51, he uses such terms interchangeably. I will use *caritas* in reference to neighborly love.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Inst.* 2.8.53 (1539), *OS* 3:392, wherein Calvin subordinates neighborly love to faith and worship.

to the two tables of the Decalogue.<sup>22</sup> In the preface to his *Mosaic Harmony*, he teaches that the Decalogue summarizes “the Rule of a Just and Holy Life.”<sup>23</sup> This does not mean, however, that the Pentateuchal precepts detailed outside the Decalogue do not outline holy and righteous living, for the precepts outside the two tablets “differ not at all from them in sense.”<sup>24</sup> Rather, the commands listed outside the two tablets are “supplements” to the Decalogue, detailing holy and righteous living.<sup>25</sup> While many of the supplements have been abrogated in Christ (e.g., ceremonial laws), the substance of the ten words is permanently fixed, required of God’s people throughout all dispensations.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Calvin generally understands *pietas* as the essence of love for God, summarized in the first table, and *iustitia* as the essence of love for neighbor, summarized in the second.<sup>27</sup>

This emphasis on love means that the Christian life is profoundly active. Holiness and righteousness require not just abstaining from evil but also pursuing the spiritual good. This is evinced in Calvin’s principle of opposites.<sup>28</sup> When we read divine commands in Scripture, we must consider both the matter they treat and their opposite

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<sup>22</sup> McKee, *Calvin on the Deaconate*, 231-258, demonstrates that these two heads are often reflected by various equivalents: *cultus, fides, timor Dei, religio, Gloria Dei*, etc., and *innocentia, integritas, humanitas, dilectio, aequitas*, etc. McKee provides an extensive linguistic study of Calvin’s use of these terms in relation to the law and Christian living, and it is unnecessary to rehearse here the references to Calvin’s works that she provides. See especially 253n.85-86, 254n.88-89.

<sup>23</sup> *Preface to Mosaic Harmony* 1:xvi, *CO* 24:7-8. Cf. *Comm. Ex.* 5:16, *CO* 24:602 ; *Comm. Ex.* 31:18, *CO* 25:79; *Inst.* 2.7.1 (1559), *OS* 3:326.

<sup>24</sup> *Preface to Mosaic Harmony* 1:xvi, *CO* 24:7-8. Ford Lewis Battles, *Interpreting John Calvin*, ed. Robert Benedetto (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 310, explains that the intent of the whole law “is to provide a rule for a just and holy life” and that “the clue to the whole is the Decalogue.”

<sup>25</sup> *Comm. Deut.* 18:19, *CO* 24:354. Calvin also speaks frequently of “expositions” of the law, which are “the many admonitions, precepts, exhortations” that “both Prophets and apostles are continually employing” (1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:69, *OS* 2:112; cf. *Serm. Ten Commandments* 136, *CO* 26:310). Cf. Battles, *Interpreting John Calvin*, 311; William Klempa, “Calvin on Natural Law,” in *John Calvin and the Prism of Reform*, ed. Timothy George (Louisville: WJKP, 1990), 78-79.

<sup>26</sup> *Comm. Deut.* 18:19, *CO* 24:354; *Serm. Ten Commandments* 48, *CO* 26:244-245. Cf. Schreiner, “John Calvin,” 131-132.

<sup>27</sup> See Battles, *Interpreting John Calvin*, 289-290, who demonstrates that while *pietas* is “the shorthand symbol for [Calvin’s] whole understanding and practice of the Christian life,” it is connected more specifically to knowledge, love, and worship of God. Cf. Joel R. Beeke, “Calvin on Piety,” in *CCJC*, 126; Haas, “Calvin’s Ethics,” 102; Richard, *Spirituality of John Calvin*, 100-101.

<sup>28</sup> See Farley, “Introduction,” in *Serm. Ten Commandments*, xx; Schreiner, “John Calvin,” 128.

so we may fully understand what pleases God.<sup>29</sup> “The commandments and prohibitions always contain more than is expressed in words;” each command is to be understood as a synecdoche.<sup>30</sup> Readers must look beyond the mere words to understand a precept’s full meaning. As Hesselink remarks, “If interpreted literally,” the commands are “limited in scope;” but as Calvin universalizes the commands and interprets them positively, they assume “tremendous breadth and depth.”<sup>31</sup>

Here, we must ask whether believers are able to keep the law. Calvin’s threefold use of the law provides the answer. *Pre lapsum*, God’s commands and the natural order functioned as “the school in which we were to learn piety, and pass from it over to eternal life and perfect felicity.” *Post lapsum*, however, they now “overwhelm our souls with despair,” showing us our inability to keep God’s commands and need for a savior.<sup>32</sup> This revelation is the first use of the law. The second use curbs wickedness “by fear of punishment.”<sup>33</sup> While these negative uses are imperative, they are not the primary or primordial use but are accidental.<sup>34</sup> The third use—revelation of what pleases God—is the original and “principal use” and applies only to “believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns.”<sup>35</sup> Further, the law “is the best instrument for

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<sup>29</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.8 (1539), *OS* 3:350-351.

<sup>30</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.8 (1539), *OS* 3:350. Cf. I. John Hesselink, *Calvin’s Concept of the Law* (Eugene: Pickwick, 1992), 113.

<sup>31</sup> Hesselink, *Calvin’s Concept of the Law*, 114. Hesselink is commenting directly on Calvin’s interpretation of the first command, yet in context he shows that Calvin interprets the other commands similarly. Cf. *idem.*, “Christ, the Law, and the Christian: An Unexplored Aspect of the Third Use of the Law in Calvin’s Theology,” in *Reformatio Perennis: Essays on Calvin and the Reformation in Honor of Ford Lewis Battles*, eds. B.A. Gerrish and Robert Benedetto (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1981), 16; Haas, “Calvin’s Ethics,” 101-102.

<sup>32</sup> *Inst.* 2.6.1 (1559), *OS* 3:320. Cf. *Inst.* 2.7.3-9.

<sup>33</sup> *Inst.* 2.7.10 (1536), *OS* 3:335.

<sup>34</sup> *Comm.* Gen. 2:16, *CO* 23:45.

<sup>35</sup> *Inst.* 2.7.12 (1539,1536), *OS* 3:337. On Calvin’s third use, see Billings, *Calvin*, 144-161; Chung, *Spirituality and Social Ethics*, 76-79; Dowey, *Knowledge of God*, 225-232; Guenther H. Haas, *The Concept of Equity and Ethics* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 65-66; Hesselink, *Calvin’s Concept of the Law*, 52-56, 217-276; Vos, “The Christian Self-Image,” 89-90. Hesselink observes that Calvin not only begins his discussion of the law in the *Institutio* by relating it to Christ (87)—the general theme of book 2 is “The Knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ”—but also connects the third use to the Spirit’s work (251). Kolb and Trueman, *Between Wittenberg and Geneva*, 56, also highlight the connection between the law and Spirit. Hesselink, “Christ, the Law, and the Christian,” 17-20; and Edward Dowey, “Law in Luther and Calvin,” *Theology Today* (July 1984): 152, argue that Calvin’s discussion of the Christian life in *Institutio* book 3 is an outworking of the third use.

While other Reformers were able to speak of the law as a gift that reveals God’s will, curbs sin in society, and shows our need for a savior, Melancthon introduced the idea of a third use of the law, believing that the law played a positive role in believers’ lives. See Kolb and Trueman, *Between Wittenberg and Geneva*, 39-40; Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 191-200. Thus,



[believers] to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it."<sup>36</sup> By meditating on the law, we are "aroused to obedience." By obeying it, we not only are "drawn back from the slippery path of transgression," but also "strive toward God's righteousness," even if sluggishly.<sup>37</sup> For believers, the law is a blessing, leading them to a clearer knowledge of God and his will. Moreover, by the Spirit's power, believers are able to obey the law, though imperfectly.<sup>38</sup>

We will now examine Calvin's teachings on the Decalogue to understand the content of good works.<sup>39</sup> For the "two parts of Christianity" (holiness and righteousness, or love for God and love for neighbor) correspond to "the two tables of the Law."<sup>40</sup> And from what we have discovered thus far, we may proceed with the following description of what constitutes good works: *Acts of obedience to God's law, performed out of genuine love for God and neighbor in faith.*

## 5.2. Love for God: Obedience to the First Table

The first table of the Decalogue takes precedence over the second.<sup>41</sup> This does not mean the second is optional but that knowing and glorifying God is "the chief end of human

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Calvin is more in line with Melancthon than with Luther, who, while affirming the law's positive role, tended to emphasize its "crushing" function more than its instructive function (Kolb and Trueman, 43).

<sup>36</sup> *Inst.* 2.7.12 (1539/1536), *OS* 3:337.

<sup>37</sup> *Inst.* 2.7.12 (1539), *OS* 3:338.

<sup>38</sup> Billings, *Calvin*, 146-170, is especially insightful on this.

<sup>39</sup> For Calvin, the Decalogue is also a guide to true worship (see 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:68, *OS* 2:111). He believes worship and good works are inextricably linked, as will become clear in our discussions below.

<sup>40</sup> *Comm.* Heb. 6:11, *CO* 55:76. Cf. Chung, *Spirituality and Social Ethics*, 80; Richard, *Spirituality of John Calvin*, 116-117.

It may seem more appropriate to focus primarily on Calvin's summary of the Christian life in *Inst.* 3.7-10, since God has given us a more specific plan of life than of that in the law (see 3.7.1 [1539], *OS* 4:151). Yet Calvin's treatments of self-denial, cross-bearing, meditation on the future life, and the proper use of earthly blessings are essentially different facets of his understanding of the Christian life and thus the law more generally. For our present purposes, we are interested in Calvin's more specific understanding of the Christian life, which is expressed more thoroughly in his discussions of the law and other related themes. Further, some of the themes he discusses in *Inst.* 3.7-10 are found in his discussions of the law. For example, in *Inst.* 3.7, he discuss the significance of self-denial, but he discusses particular duties of self-denial (e.g., Sabbath-keeping, charity, etc.) more in his treatment of the Decalogue. Thus, instead of focusing primarily on *Inst.* 3.7-10, I will reference, when fitting, themes therein that relate to our discussion of the Decalogue.

<sup>41</sup> See Battles, *Interpreting John Calvin*, 291.

life.”<sup>42</sup> The law teaches first that “we have a God to whom we belong” and that “we ought to walk in his obedience.”<sup>43</sup> Further, “Insomuch as the honor of God is more excellent than all that concerns men, it was appropriate that in the first and highest stage the rule was given for God to be honored as [indeed] we ought.”<sup>44</sup> The first table takes priority because God created and redeemed us so we may worship him. Additionally, the service of God is treated first “because it is impossible for men to act as they should toward their neighbors unless they are led by the fear of God.”<sup>45</sup>

The first command teaches us to worship God alone.<sup>46</sup> In *Institutio* book 1, before his extended discussion of the law in book 2, Calvin functionally equates worship with piety, the substance of the first table.<sup>47</sup> Calvin calls *pietas* “that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces.”<sup>48</sup> Discussing *pietas* further, Calvin states that God “defines lawful worship in order to hold mankind in obedience. He combines both under his Law, first when he binds believers to himself to be their sole lawgiver, and then when he prescribes a rule whereby he is to be duly honored according to his own will.”<sup>49</sup> True worship/piety is captured in the law. Admittedly, as Elsie Anne McKee explains, “Christians are not bound to the ceremonial law but they are obligated to the substance of the ten commandments, and the decalog provides one of the best ways to describe the contours of Calvin’s teaching on worship.”<sup>50</sup> Worship/piety is reverent love for God, but it is not simply sentimental. It must be expressed outwardly, and the law prescribes certain acts for honoring God.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> 1545 *Catechism* in *Tracts* 2:37, *OS* 2:75. Cf. Dennis Ngien, “The Trinitarian Dynamic of Worship in John Calvin’s Institutes (1559),” *ETL* 83.1 (2007): 25-27.

<sup>43</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 122, *CO* 26:300.

<sup>44</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 133-134, *CO* 26:309. Cf. *Serm. Ten Commandments* 247-248, *CO* 26:392.

<sup>45</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 134, *CO* 26:309. Cf. *Comm. Ezek.* 18:5-9, *CO* 40:426; Richard, *Spirituality of John Calvin*, 117.

<sup>46</sup> *Comm. Ex.* 20:4, *CO* 24:376.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Richard, *Spirituality of John Calvin*, 118, who states that worship is the primary element of *pietas*.

<sup>48</sup> *Inst.* 1.2.1 (1559), *OS* 3:35.

<sup>49</sup> *Inst.* 1.12.1 (1559), *OS* 3:106.

<sup>50</sup> Elsie Anne McKee, “Context, Contours, Contents: Towards a Description of Calvin’s Understanding of Worship,” in *Calvin and Spirituality: Papers Presented at the 10th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies, May 18-20, 1995, Calvin Theological Seminary*, ed. David Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 1998): 69.

<sup>51</sup> Though not commenting on the Decalogue, Randall Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 351-352,

Calvin outlines these acts in book 2. True worship, which includes “innumerable” duties, may be grouped into four heads: “(1) adoration, . . . (2) trust, (3) invocation, (4) thanksgiving.”<sup>52</sup> *Adoration* is “the veneration and worship that each of us, in submitting to his greatness, renders to [God].” This includes submitting “our consciences to his Law.” By *trust*, Calvin means that we repose in God “under a recognition of his attributes” and ascribe to him “all wisdom, righteousness, might, truth, and goodness.” *Invocation* is “that habit of our mind, whenever necessity presses, of resorting to his faithfulness and help as our only support.” *Thanksgiving* is “the gratitude with which we ascribe praise to him for all good things.”<sup>53</sup> These duties bear striking resemblance, though not total equivalence, to the main elements of the liturgy—prayer, praise, preaching, and the sacraments<sup>54</sup>—that Calvin discusses elsewhere, even in his expositions of the second, third, and fourth commands. As McKee remarks, the liturgy gives “bodily expression to the heart’s worship.”<sup>55</sup> Or, “the worship which fulfills the first table . . . includes both the devout adoration of the heart and the expression of that adoration in outward forms.”<sup>56</sup> As faith is expressed by good works, so worship/piety is expressed by particular deeds, especially by participation in corporate worship yet also in certain practices within the personal lives of believers.<sup>57</sup> Calvin in no way divorces public and private worship; both are integral to true piety.<sup>58</sup>

### 5.2.1. Communal Worship

Expounding the Sabbath, Calvin states that “the object of this Commandment is that believers should exercise themselves in the worship of God.” Additionally, the Sabbath stimulates believers to maintain “their care and zeal for religion.”<sup>59</sup> While Calvin

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emphasizes that faith cannot remain hidden in the heart and must be acknowledged before others (cf. 353-355).

<sup>52</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.16 (1539), *OS* 3:357. Cf. 1545 *Catechism* in *Tracts* 2:57, *OS* 2:97, for a similar though not identical list.

<sup>53</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.16 (1539), *OS* 3:357-358.

<sup>54</sup> See *Inst.* 4.17.43 (1536), *OS* 5:409; *Serm. Ten Commandments* 109,111-112, *CO* 26:292,294; 1545 *Catechism* in *Tracts* 2:62-63, *OS* 2:103-104. Elsewhere, Calvin includes almsgiving in the order of worship.

<sup>55</sup> McKee, “Context, Contours, Contents,” 71.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>57</sup> See *ibid.*, 75,79; Battles, *Interpreting John Calvin*, 292-293,305; Beeke, “Calvin on Piety,” 139,144.

<sup>58</sup> See Baker, *Participation in Christ*, 31-32; Richard, *Spirituality of John Calvin*, 179.

<sup>59</sup> *Comm. Ex.* 20:8, *CO* 24:576.

indicates that worship is expressed in particular outward acts, he also teaches that resting from labor and works is a principal means whereby we worship God and exercise our faith. This command, then, includes a principle of opposites: negatively, we are to rest from our labor and works; positively, we are to participate in communal worship.<sup>60</sup> Further, the Sabbath is a sign that God sanctifies us, and this sanctification includes mortification/vivification.<sup>61</sup> According to Paul, Calvin explains, the substance of the Sabbath is “no ordinary good thing,”<sup>62</sup> for “God inculcates no other commandment more frequently, nor more strictly requires obedience to any.”<sup>63</sup> Moreover, Christ is the substance of the shadow contained in the law. Although the external observation of the Sabbath is nullified by Christ’s work, the substance of the Sabbath remains eternal in purpose.<sup>64</sup> Further,

The imperative thing is that we set aside our prudence and listen to God speak, following neither our sense nor our imagination. That is the beginning of how we ought to keep the sabbath day: by disbelieving what seems good to us, for of necessity we rest. And how rest? By abiding in such a way that our thoughts do not flutter about or invent first one thing and then another. It is necessary (I say) that we live in obedience to God.<sup>65</sup>

Stated differently, the “genuine reason of the Commandment” is that “we should rest from our works ‘even as God from His.’” The “legitimate use of the Sabbath,” therefore, is “self-renunciation.”<sup>66</sup> We must look not to ourselves and our wisdom but to

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<sup>60</sup> See *Comm. Ex. 20:8, CO 24:576-577*. On whether Calvin believed the Sabbath requires Christians to observe a principal or even recurring day of the week—and whether his teaching suffers inconsistency—see Richard Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath: The Controversy of Applying the Fourth Commandment* (Fern, Ross-Shire: Mentor, 1998), 36-42, 73-117, 142-143. Presently, I am not interested in discussing whether Calvin believes a specific or recurring day of the week is required for Sabbath-keeping, but rather his views on Sabbath-keeping as a means of piety. On the twofold nature of Sabbath observance (resting from works and participating in worship), see Lawrence A. Gilpin, “An Analysis of Calvin’s Sermons on the Fourth Commandment,” *Presbyterion* 30.2 (Fall 2004): 93-94.

<sup>61</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:8, CO 24:577*. On the sanctifying nature of the Sabbath, see Chung, *Spirituality and Social Ethics*, 81; Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath*, 35, 93-95, 141.

<sup>62</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:8, CO 24:578*.

<sup>63</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:8, CO 24:577*. One reason the Sabbath is mentioned more frequently is that it represents the whole worship of God (*Comm. Lev. 26:34, CO 25:27*).

<sup>64</sup> *Comm. Ex. 31:13, CO 24:584*.

<sup>65</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments 101, CO 26:286*.

<sup>66</sup> *Comm. Ex 20:8, CO 24:578*. Cf. *Serm. Ten Commandments 102, 113, CO 26:286, 295; 1545 Catechism in Tracts 2:61, OS 2:102*. On self-denial and piety, see Beeke, “Calvin on Piety,” 141-142.

God and his Word to worship him rightly.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, we violate the Sabbath if we regard our works as originating from us rather than from God.<sup>68</sup>

Sabbath rest is not accomplished privately. The Sabbath's design is "to *gather us* in order that according to our weakness we might be trained to devote ourselves better to the service of God."<sup>69</sup> While Sabbath-keeping requires *self*-denial, such renunciation cannot be done properly in isolation from the faith community.<sup>70</sup> Scripture provides an "external order" (i.e., liturgy) that "we might meditate on the works of God and be trained to recognize the favors which God bestows on us."<sup>71</sup> Thus, the Sabbath exists that we might also consider God's works, just as God did on day seven of creation.<sup>72</sup> Further, the Sabbath "inspires us to recognize the grace which [God] daily offers us in his Gospel that we might be conformed to it more and more. And when we have spent Sunday in praising and glorifying the name of God and in meditating on his works, then, throughout the rest of the week, we should show that we have benefited from it."<sup>73</sup> Such meditation helps us to devote ourselves to him the rest of the time.<sup>74</sup> Sabbath-keeping, therefore, is a way for believers, both corporately and individually, to exercise *trust* in God, one of the four duties of worship. Further, because self-denial is integral to Sabbath-keeping, it appears that rest and participation in communal worship are integral to one's *renovatio*, which we discovered in the previous chapter cannot occur apart from self-denial. By denying ourselves and placing our trust in God, we mortify the flesh and become increasingly holy while expressing our devotion to him. And Sabbath-keeping seems to be a chief means whereby all this occurs. Thus, as Hesselink remarks, the fourth command expresses "the basic pattern of the Christian life."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. *Inst.* 3.7.2 (1539), *OS* 4:152; *Inst.* 3.7.8 (1539), *OS* 4:158.

<sup>68</sup> *Comm.* Ex 20:8, *CO* 24:578.

<sup>69</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 111, *CO* 26:294.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Beeke, "Calvin on Piety," 131: "Growth in piety is impossible apart from the church."

<sup>71</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 113, *CO* 26:295.

<sup>72</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 104, *CO* 26:288; 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:62, *OS* 2:103. On the Sabbath as a "creation ordinance," see Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath*, 30-31, 73-81; Gilpin, "Calvin's Sermons on the Fourth Commandment," 94.

<sup>73</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 113, *CO* 26:295.

<sup>74</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 110, *CO* 26:293.

<sup>75</sup> Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law*, 120. Cf. Richard, *Spirituality of John Calvin*, 124: "true piety [is] impossible without self-denial."

Calvin also states that union with God is “the highest good of men” and that “we are unable to have a true union and sanctity with him unless we rest from our work.”<sup>76</sup> Further, “the bond of this union” is “that we do not alienate ourselves from [God’s] religion and truth, but permit him to govern us.”<sup>77</sup> What Calvin means by *religion* here are the precepts delivered in the first table of the law. Integral to these precepts, especially Sabbath-keeping, are the key elements of the liturgy. Therefore, by resting from their labor and their works—their own desires, wisdom, and sinful inclinations—and by submitting to God’s order and wisdom by contemplating his works in the context of the church gathering, believers grow into deeper communion with God.<sup>78</sup>

Now that we have discussed Sabbath-keeping generally, it is imperative to consider the various components of the liturgy and how they enable believers to further observe the duties of worship. God commands us to gather “that we might be taught by his Word, that we might convene together in order to confess our faith, to invoke his name, and to participate in the use of the sacraments.”<sup>79</sup> Calvin does not discuss these practices at length in his expositions of the fourth command but gives them detailed attention in his understanding of the previous three. Moving forward we will consider his expositions of these commands and their corresponding teachings elsewhere in his writings.

### 5.2.2. Prayer

The duty of *invocation* is prayer.<sup>80</sup> Prayer is a primary way believers obey the first table because “when we invoke God, we testify that we expect no good from any other quarter, and that we place our whole defence in no other.”<sup>81</sup> This seems to be the logic behind the title of Calvin’s chapter on prayer in the *Institutio*: “the chief exercise of faith.”<sup>82</sup> Calvin states that “among the duties of godliness the Scriptures commend none more frequently.”<sup>83</sup> Prayer, as an exercise of faith, is the principal act whereby we

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<sup>76</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 105, CO 26:288-289.

<sup>77</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 105-106, CO 26:289.

<sup>78</sup> See *Serm. Ten Commandments* 110, CO 26:292. See Zachman, *Image and Word*, 347, on public worship and union with God.

<sup>79</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 109, CO 26:292.

<sup>80</sup> 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:70, OS 2:113. Cf. *Inst.* 3.20.27 (1559), OS 4:332, wherein Calvin calls prayer a “duty of piety.”

<sup>81</sup> 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:70, OS 2:113.

<sup>82</sup> *Inst.* 3.20 (1559), OS 4:296.

<sup>83</sup> *Inst.* 3.20.13 (1559/1539), OS 4:313.

devote ourselves to God and “prove our piety.”<sup>84</sup> It is a response to God’s work for us and in us, and a demonstration of our trust in him.<sup>85</sup>

According to Calvin, one must engage in both private and public prayer to worship God rightly.<sup>86</sup> In fact, “whoever refuse[s] to pray in the holy assembly of the godly knows not what it is to pray individually, or in a secret spot, or at home.”<sup>87</sup> Preaching on 1 Timothy 2:8, which Calvin connects to the Lord’s Prayer, he states that believers must participate in the collective if their prayers are to be effective: “[Christ] does not tell us each to call on God individually; when I say ‘Our’ I speak in the name of all, and each one does the same. Thus we do not have access to pray to God if we are not joined together, for the one who separates himself from his neighbors closes his mouth such that he cannot pray to God in the fashion our Lord Jesus Christ ordained.”<sup>88</sup> Conversely, “he who neglects to pray alone and in private, however unremittingly he may frequent public assemblies, there contrives only windy prayers, for he defers more to the opinion of men than to the secret judgment of God.” The “office of prayer,” which is “the chief part of [God’s] worship,” must be expressed both privately and publically for it to be worship at all.<sup>89</sup>

Though Calvin sees prayer as integral to piety/worship, does he consider it a good work? While he never explicitly calls prayer a good work, he regularly describes it in ways that bear striking resemblance to his understanding of good works. He teaches that “true prayer flows from faith (Rom. x. 14).”<sup>90</sup> Similarly, the works that God accepts flow from faith. Moreover, Calvin teaches that the defects in our prayers must be pardoned to be accepted and answered by God.<sup>91</sup> Likewise, works please God only

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<sup>84</sup> *Inst.* 3.20.44 (1559), *OS* 4:356.

<sup>85</sup> Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 272-273, states that prayer is a “response to the forgiving grace of God in Jesus Christ; . . . is essentially the activity of the forgiven within the relationship of reconciliation.” Cf. Dawei Shao, “Calvin’s Teachings on Prayer in the Framework of Salvation History,” *PRJ* 10.2 (2018): 110, who highlights thanksgiving as a primary element of prayer.

<sup>86</sup> See Zachman, *Image and Word*, 344-345, 348-349, 366-367, on the importance of both private and public prayer. Cf. Beeke “Calvin on Piety,” 139.

<sup>87</sup> *Inst.* 3.20.29 (1559), *OS* 4:339-340.

<sup>88</sup> *Serm.* 16 on 1 Tim 2:8, *CO* 53:190, translated by Elsie Anne McKee, “Calvin and Praying for ‘All People Who Dwell on Earth,’” *Interpretation* (April 2009): 137.

<sup>89</sup> *Inst.* 3.20.29 (1559), *OS* 4:340.

<sup>90</sup> 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:73, *OS* 2:116.

<sup>91</sup> See *Inst.* 3.20.16 (1539), *OS* 4:320-21. Cf. Ngien, “The Trinitarian Dynamic of Worship,” 39.

when he overlooks their imperfections and embraces them in Christ.<sup>92</sup> Calvin also teaches that God promises blessings to awaken believers from spiritual slothfulness and excite them to pray.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Calvin teaches that God promises rewards for works to awaken us from spiritual idleness and excite us to obedience.<sup>94</sup> Calvin also asserts that in prayer, believers commune with God.<sup>95</sup> We recall here Calvin's teaching that holiness is our bond to God.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, Calvin describes prayer as a human activity made possible by the Spirit—one that is indeed useful to believers and seems to have soteriological value, in the sense that was described in the previous chapter. Prayer, he teaches, is the act by which “we dig up . . . the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord's gospel, and which our faith has gazed upon.”<sup>97</sup> Prayer, then, is an act whereby we unearth Christ's benefits and apply them to our lives. All this—in addition to the fact that Calvin sees prayer as a demonstration of piety, just as good works are a manifestation of faith—suggests that Calvin considers prayer a good work, an act of obedience to the law out of heartfelt love for God.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> See “3.2. Double Justification.”

<sup>93</sup> *Inst.* 3.20.28 (1536,1559), *OS* 4:335.

<sup>94</sup> See “4.4. Good Works and Reward.”

<sup>95</sup> 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:71, *OS* 2:114. Cf. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva, and the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 214: “the heart and goal of prayer is communion with God.”

<sup>96</sup> See “4.4. Good Works and Communion with God.”

<sup>97</sup> *Inst.* 3.20.2 (1539), *OS* 4:297-298.

<sup>98</sup> Ngien, “The Trinitarian Dynamic of Worship,” 36, also claims that prayer is a good work.



### 5.2.3. Praise<sup>99</sup>

In expounding the third command, Calvin describes the praise of God, which is the duty of *adoration*. He states that man's tongue "was created to celebrate the praises of God" and that we act impiously when it "is employed in insulting Him."<sup>100</sup> While the third command focuses directly on not defaming God's majesty, the implication is that God's name should be honored and praised, in both thought and speech.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, Calvin asserts that upholding "the holiness of God's name . . . preserves us in His fear and in true piety."<sup>102</sup> Reverently praising God is a way believers demonstrate and maintain *pietas*.

Keeping this command includes three distinct acts. First, whatever we think and say must "savor of [God's] excellence, match the loftiness of his sacred name, and lastly, serve to glorify his greatness."<sup>103</sup> Second, "we should not rashly or perversely abuse his Holy Word and worshipful mysteries either for the sake of our own ambition, or greed, or amusement" but should honor and prize them. Third, "we should not defame or detract from his works . . . but whatever we recognize as done by him we should speak of with praise of his wisdom, righteousness, and goodness." God's Word, works, and name/majesty are inextricably connected, Calvin explains. When we observe all three elements of this command, we "hallow God's name." In acting otherwise, God's name is "polluted with empty and wicked abuse."<sup>104</sup> So while this command

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<sup>99</sup> In her analyses of Calvin's order of worship, McKee includes praise under the rubric of prayer (see "Context, Contours, Contents," 85). This is not unwarranted, as Calvin himself offers varying orders. In some lists, he lumps together prayer and praise/confession, and includes almsgiving or fellowship as a separate component (e.g., *Comm.* Acts 2:42, *COR* II/XII.1:87-88; *Inst.* 4.17.44 [1536], *OS* 5:410). He also identifies two types of prayer, spoken and sung (see *La forme des prières et chantz ecclésiastiques* [1542], *OS* 2:15, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, "John Calvin: The Form of Prayers and Songs of the Church; 1542, Letter to the Reader," *CTJ* 15 [1980]: 162-163, hereafter cited as "Letter to the Reader"). In this latter document, Calvin offers a threefold order of worship: preaching, prayers (both spoken and sung), and sacraments ("Letter to the Reader" 161, *OS* 2:13; cf. *Inst.* 2.8.32 (1539/1536), *OS* 3:373-374). Elsewhere, he omits almsgiving or fellowship, and includes both prayer and praise/confession as distinct practices (e.g., 1545 *Catechism* in *Tracts* 2:62-63, *OS* 2:103-104; *Serm. Ten Commandments* 109,111-112, *CO* 26:292,294; *Inst.* 4.17.43 [1536], *OS* 5:409). Due to such variances, I have elected to treat prayer and praise separately. Calvin himself sometimes distinguishes the two (see *Comm.* Ps. 50:14, *CO* 31:501).

<sup>100</sup> *Comm.* Lev. 24:15, *CO* 24:575.

<sup>101</sup> See *Inst.* 2.8.22 (1539), *OS* 3:363-364.

<sup>102</sup> *Comm.* Ex. 20:7, *CO* 24:561.

<sup>103</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.22 (1539), *OS* 3:363-364.

<sup>104</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.22 (1539), *OS* 3:364. Zachman, *Word and Image*, 369, remarks that impiety manifests itself in contempt for God's Word and works.

forbids us from dishonoring God's name, its substance is captured in its corresponding precept: to praise God and thus observe the duty of *adoration*.<sup>105</sup>

While Calvin teaches that one's entire life should uphold the third command, he indicates that sung prayers and hymns are specific acts of praise. In the letter to the reader of his 1542 *La forme des prières et chantz ecclésiastiques*, he states, "Singing has great power and vigor to move and inflame men's hearts to call upon and praise God with a more vehement and burning zeal."<sup>106</sup> And when we sing the psalms, "we are certain that God has put the words in our mouth as if they themselves sang in us to exalt his glory."<sup>107</sup>

The sacraments are also acts of praise/adoration. We will demonstrate this thoroughly in our discussion of the Lord's Supper below, yet here we will comment briefly on baptism. Baptism "serves as our confession before men" whereby not only "our hearts breathe the praise of God, but our tongues also and all members of our body resound his praise."<sup>108</sup> Singing and celebrating the sacraments, therefore, are principal means whereby believers worship God and demonstrate their piety.<sup>109</sup>

#### **5.2.4. The Preaching/Hearing of the Word**

Given the sixteenth-century Protestant conviction that Scripture is the ultimate authority for doctrine and practice, the cornerstone of the liturgy is the preaching/hearing of God's Word.<sup>110</sup> This was certainly true in Calvin's Geneva, and the sincere preaching/hearing of the Word is the first mark of the true church, Calvin explains.<sup>111</sup> Further, the church should keep "safe and uncorrupted that doctrine in which piety stands sound." True piety depends upon correct doctrine, not in every minutia but in the

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<sup>105</sup> In *Inst.* 2.8.23-26, Calvin discusses oaths at length, explaining which are permissible and honor God, and which are not and insult him. While Calvin devotes most of discussion of the third command to oaths, he asserts that the command relates primarily to "the worship of God and the reverence of his name" (*Inst.* 2.8.22 [1559], *OS* 3:364). In discussing oaths, Calvin is explaining practical ways that God's name is either revered or defamed.

<sup>106</sup> "Letter to the Reader" 163, *OS* 2:15.

<sup>107</sup> "Letter to the Reader" 164, *OS* 2:17. Cf. Beeke, "Calvin on Piety," 137-139, on piety and the Psalter.

<sup>108</sup> *Inst.* 4.15.13 (Beveridge) (1536), *OS* 4:294.

<sup>109</sup> See Zachman, *Image and Word*, 353-355, on the importance of public praise/thanksgiving. Ngien, "The Trinitarian Dynamic of Worship," 36, also claims that "praises" are good works.

<sup>110</sup> See McKee, "Context, Contours, Contents," 82.

<sup>111</sup> See *Inst.* 4.1.9-12 (mainly 1536, 1539), *OS* 5:13-16.

particulars of religion—namely, the apostolic creedal points.<sup>112</sup> Further, preaching is the primary way God matures believers and educates the church.<sup>113</sup> Commenting on the Sabbath, Calvin states that God intended for believers to gather on a specific day so that, in addition to observing other practices, they could “hear the law.”<sup>114</sup> Preaching/hearing God’s Word are principal means whereby believers are “trained in piety”<sup>115</sup> and thus observe the first table.

While most of Calvin’s discussion of preaching in *Institutio* book 4 concerns the office and role of preachers, it also addresses the role of listeners. Hearing God’s Word and its exposition is an act of worship. While Calvin explains that preaching is given primarily that God may strengthen our faith, he also states that God “proves our obedience by a very good test when we hear his ministers speaking just as if he himself spoke.”<sup>116</sup> Principally, preaching is God’s accommodation to us, his act of providing us spiritual nourishment.<sup>117</sup> Yet listening to God’s ministers and receiving their teaching is a mark of piety toward God. When believers listen to the preacher and embrace his doctrine, they embrace God himself. And refuting those who read and meditate upon God’s Word only privately, Calvin asserts that attending “public assemblies” to “embrace obediently the doctrine of salvation” is an “exercise of religion [*pietatis exercitio*].”<sup>118</sup> Given that Calvin relates good works to *pietas*, we may deduce that hearing/preaching the Word is functionally a good work whereby believers worship God and demonstrate their faith.

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<sup>112</sup> *Inst.* 4.1.12 (1539), *OS* 5:16.

<sup>113</sup> *Inst.* 4.1.5 (1559), *OS* 5:8. On preaching as the edification of the church, see J. Mark Beach, “The Real Presence of Christ in the Preaching of the Gospel: Luther and Calvin on the Nature of Preaching,” *MJT* 10 (1999): 92-96, 110-112; Dawn DeVries, “Calvin’s Preaching,” in *CCJC*, 109-110.

<sup>114</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.28 (1539), *OS* 3:371.

<sup>115</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.28 (1545), *OS* 3:371. Cf. Beeke, “Calvin on Piety,” 131-133.

<sup>116</sup> *Inst.* 4.1.5 (1559), *OS* 5:9. On Calvin identifying preaching with divine speech, see Balserak, *Divinity Compromised*, 61; Beach, “The Real Presence of Christ,” 97-100; DeVries, “Calvin’s Preaching,” 108-110.

<sup>117</sup> See *Comm.* Acts 7:40, *COR* II/XII.1:206-207. Cf. Balserak, *Divinity Compromised*, 61, 64n.51; Beach, “The Real Presence of Christ,” 92-93; DeVries, “Calvin’s Preaching,” 108.

<sup>118</sup> *Inst.* 4.1.5 (1559), *OS* 5:9. Cf. Beach, “The Real Presence of Christ,” 102-103, 114-115, on the necessity of private reading and submitting to the preached Word.

### 5.2.5. The Sacraments

Calvin considers the right administration of the sacraments to be the second mark of the church.<sup>119</sup> Following Augustine, he sees a sacrament as a “visible word” because “it represents God’s promises as printed in a picture and sets them before our sight, portrayed graphically and in the manner of images.”<sup>120</sup>

In his *Mosaic Harmony*, Calvin connects the Passover, which is analogous to the Lord’s Supper, with the first command. The Supper, therefore, is a means whereby believers observe the first table, just as circumcision and the Passover were means whereby the Israelites worshiped God.<sup>121</sup> In commenting on the second commandment, which defines “legitimate worship,”<sup>122</sup> Calvin frequently draws attention to the sacraments.<sup>123</sup> Just as sacrifices and other ceremonies were integral to worship for the Israelites, so the sacraments are for Christians.<sup>124</sup>

Though Calvin sees the ancient cultic ceremonies as “works” of the law,<sup>125</sup> does he view the sacraments as good works? On one hand, he is adamant that the sacraments are *not* works. In his 1555 *The Defense of the Sane and Orthodox Doctrine of the Sacraments*—an apologia for the *Consensus Tigurinus* (1551) in response to Joachim Westphal, a Lutheran pastor who had criticized the *Consensus* and its reception—Calvin states, “The acts of which the Son of God is the author . . . are no acts of man.”<sup>126</sup> And in his general discussion of the sacraments in the *Institutio*, he writes, “Whatever the sophists have dreamed up concerning the *opus operatum* is not only false but contradicts

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<sup>119</sup> See *Inst.* 4.1.9-12 (mainly 1536,1539), *OS* 5:13-16.

<sup>120</sup> *Inst.* 4.14.6 (1536), *OS* 5:263.

<sup>121</sup> *Comm.* Ex. 12:1, *CO* 24:286.

<sup>122</sup> *Comm.* Ex. 20:4, *CO* 24:376.

<sup>123</sup> See *Comm.* Lev. 16:16, *CO* 24:503-504; *Comm.* Lev. 4:22, *CO* 24:519.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Beeke, “Calvin on Piety,” 133-136, who shows that believers exercise piety in celebrating the sacraments.

<sup>125</sup> See *Comm.* Ex. 20:8, *CO* 24:577.

<sup>126</sup> *Mutual Consent in Tracts* 230, *OS* 2:275. The “Mutual Consent in Regard to the Sacraments . . .” in *Tracts* 2:199-244 includes translation of the prefatory letters between Calvin and the ministers of Zurich, the “Heads of Agreement” (i.e., the *Consensus* itself), and Calvin’s defense or exposition of the “Heads of Agreement” (i.e., the *Defensio Sanae et Orthodoxae Doctrinae de Sacramentis* . . . ) (*OS* 2:241-287). See Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 156, especially n.21. On the polemics between Calvin and Westphal, see Esther Chung-Kim, *Inventing Authority: The Use of the Church Fathers in Reformation Debates over the Eucharist* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 59-98; Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 155-158; Wim Janse, “The Controversy Between Westphal and Calvin on Infant Baptism,” *Perichoresis* 6.1 (2008): 3-10.

the nature of the sacraments.” Believers “are poor and deprived of all goods” and “should bring nothing to it but begging.” Thus, “no work can be ascribed to them.”<sup>127</sup>

First and foremost, the sacraments are divine gifts. Calvin elucidates this in his teaching on Communion. In his 1556 *Second Defence . . . in Answer to the Calumnies of Joachim Westphal*, he argues that what is figured in the elements is truly given “by the sacred agency of the Spirit” when faith is present.<sup>128</sup> Because “the reality of the figure” or the “thing itself” (Christ’s body and blood) is not separated from the figure (bread and wine), Christ “instills [*instillet*] life into our souls from his flesh.”<sup>129</sup> Although Christ remains in heaven bodily, he dwells in us by the Spirit, “raises us to himself, and transfuses [*transfundat*] the life-giving vigour of his flesh into us.”<sup>130</sup>

Calvin also uses language of *giving* in the *Institutio*. Calvin teaches that God has “given [*dedit*] to his church . . . a spiritual banquet, wherein Christ attests himself to be the life-giving bread.”<sup>131</sup> The benefits of his death are “spiritually imparted [*spiritualiter afferri*]” to us,<sup>132</sup> and “spiritual life . . . is offered [*porrigi*] to us to eat, when it makes us sharers in him by faith.”<sup>133</sup> Using language of *giving*, *transfusing*, *instilling*, *diffusing*, *imparting*, and *offering*, Calvin teaches that God is the primary agent in the sacraments: he gives what is signified in the elements; we simply receive.

The notion that the sacraments, and Communion particularly, are gifts and not works is articulated perhaps most poignantly in Calvin’s opposition to the supposed sacrifice of the Mass. For Calvin, Christ’s death is a once-for-all sacrifice for the remission of sins because “the Father designated him ‘priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek,’ that he should perform an everlasting priesthood.”<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> *Inst.* 4.14.26 (1559), *OS* 5:285.

<sup>128</sup> *Second Defence* in *Tracts* 2:276, *CO* 9:69. Regarding the pneumatological aspect of Calvin’s Eucharistic theology, see Wim Janse, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper,” *Perichoresis* 10.2 (2012): 141.

<sup>129</sup> *Second Defence* in *Tracts* 2:271, *CO* 9:65.

<sup>130</sup> *Second Defence* in *Tracts* 2:279, *CO* 9:72. Calvin also uses *diffundo* (“to diffuse”) (*CO* 9:70) and *inspiro* (“to instill”) (*CO* 9:73) in describing the manner whereby Christ gives us his life-giving flesh.

<sup>131</sup> *Inst.* 4.17.1 (1559/1543/1536), *OS* 5:342.

<sup>132</sup> *Inst.* 4.17.3 (1536), *OS* 5:345.

<sup>133</sup> *Inst.* 4.17.5 (1539, 1543), *OS* 5:346.

<sup>134</sup> *Inst.* 4.18.2 (1536), *OS* 5:418. Cf. Kolb and Truman, *Between Wittenberg and Geneva*, 193. Other Reformers also believed that Christ’s past work was sufficient for the forgiveness of past, present, and future sins. E.g., Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* in *LW* 36:57, *WA* 6:526; Zwingli, *Sixty-Seven Articles*, Articles 17-18 in *RC* 1:4, Niemeyer 4-5; *Short Christian Instruction* in *RC* 1:36, *CR* 89:660; *Fidei Expositio* in *RC* 1:214-215, Niemeyer 68-69.

Accordingly, the teaching that the Mass is a work whereby the priest offers Christ for reconciliation and merit undermines Christ and his work.<sup>135</sup> The notion of payment in the Supper contradicts the fact that the sacrament is a gift, Calvin argues.<sup>136</sup>

Calvin does not tolerate the idea that the Supper is a *sacrifice for pardon* or a *work of satisfaction*. The sacraments are divine gifts that confirm and strengthen faith, and confer grace. The Supper in particular is given so believers may continually feed upon Christ and grow into deeper union with him. Yet like any gift, the sacraments must be *received*. Provided Spirit-created faith is present, recipients are indeed active in the celebration of the sacraments. Believers respond to God and the gospel in a participatory manner whereby they receive what God graciously bestows,<sup>137</sup> and they do so with *thanksgiving*, one of the four duties of worship. This is especially evident in Calvin's teaching on Communion.

While the Supper is not a sacrifice for the *remission of sins*, it is sacrifice of *praise* and *thanksgiving* for what God has done in Christ.<sup>138</sup> Calvin detects two types of sacrifices in Scripture: one pertaining to propitiation/expiation whereby one is appeased before God, the other pertaining to the worship of God.<sup>139</sup> Following Augustine, Calvin states that the Supper is “nothing but a sacrifice of praise.”<sup>140</sup> In fact, “the Lord's Supper *cannot be without a sacrifice of this kind*, in which, while we proclaim [Christ's] death [1 Cor. 11:26] and give thanks, we do nothing but offer a sacrifice of praise.”<sup>141</sup> Yet we do not appear before God with our praise offering without an intercessor but offer ourselves to God through Christ.<sup>142</sup> All our sacrifices—“our prayers, praises, thanksgivings, and whatever we do in the worship of God”—ultimately “depend upon

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<sup>135</sup> See *Inst.* 4.18.1 (1543,1559), *OS* 5:417; Billings, *Calvin*, 131.

<sup>136</sup> *Inst.* 4.18.7 (1536), *OS* 5:423.

<sup>137</sup> On the Eucharist as participation in Christ, see Billings, *Calvin*, 129-141.

<sup>138</sup> On Calvin's distinction between the Supper as a sacrifice for satisfaction and a sacrifice of praise, see Baker, *Participation in Christ*, 197-198; Billings, *Calvin*, 131-133; Brian A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 153-155. While Gerrish rightly notes this distinction, he misinterprets Calvin's comments on Number 19, which will be discussed below.

<sup>139</sup> *Inst.* 4.18.13 (1536,1539), *OS* 5:429.

<sup>140</sup> *Inst.* 4.18.10 (1543), *OS* 5:426. Cf. *Inst.* 4.17.44 (1536), *OS* 5:410.

<sup>141</sup> *Inst.* 4.18.17 (1536), *OS* 5:432. Melancthon, *CTT* 280-281,283, *CR* 21:871-873,874, also distinguishes between propitiatory and Eucharistic sacrifices, stating that the Supper is the latter.

<sup>142</sup> *Inst.* 4.18.17 (1536), *OS* 5:432. On Christ as our mediator in worship, see Ngien, “The Trinitarian Dynamic of Worship,” 39-41,44.

the greater sacrifice, by which we are consecrated in soul and body to be a holy temple to the Lord.”<sup>143</sup>

This sacrifice is categorically different from the offering that Calvin describes in his commentary on Numbers 19. Therein, he states, “The command to offer [the red heifer] was given to the whole people; because, in order that we may be partakers of ablution, it is necessary that each of us should offer Christ to the Father.”<sup>144</sup> Calvin sees a connection between the sacrifice commanded of the Israelites and the activity of new-covenant believers. According to Gerrish, Calvin here teaches that we offer Christ eucharistically to the Father in the Supper,<sup>145</sup> but Calvin never explicitly connects this offering with Communion.<sup>146</sup> The only instance here in which he mentions Communion is in criticizing the papists who turned the Supper into a sacrifice for satisfaction.<sup>147</sup> While Numbers 19 indeed speaks of two offerings, one by the priest and one by the people, Calvin explains, the offering pertaining to the activity of Christians is a “daily” one that consists of “faith and prayers,” whereby “we apply to ourselves the virtue and fruit of Christ’s death.”<sup>148</sup> By this offering, we receive continued cleansing from sin, not necessarily offer the eucharistic sacrifice in the Supper.

Still, Calvin’s remarks here are curious. This offering of faith and prayers is, Calvin teaches, the means whereby Christ’s virtue and benefits are applied to us daily. And this offering indeed propitiates God, provided that “Christ Himself should interpose, and exercise the office of a priest.”<sup>149</sup> Yet the tenor of Calvin’s teaching here is in no way anthropocentric. While believers truly offer Christ, Christ is the substance of their offering. His mediatorial work, not their own efforts, is the principal reason they are continually cleansed from sin and propitiated by God. Moreover, the substance of this offering is different from that of the sacrifice in the Supper: here, believers offer Christ; in the Supper, they offer themselves. And while the Eucharistic sacrifice is one of gratitude in response to God’s work in Christ, the daily offering mentioned in

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<sup>143</sup> *Inst.* 4.18.16 (1536,1539), *OS* 5:431.

<sup>144</sup> *Comm.* Num. 19:2, *CO* 24:333.

<sup>145</sup> See Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 153-155.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Henri Blocher, “Calvin on the Lord’s Supper: Revisiting an Intriguing Diversity, Part 2,” *WTJ* 76 (2014): 414.

<sup>147</sup> *Comm.* Num. 19:2, *CO* 24:333.

<sup>148</sup> *Comm.* Num. 19:2, *CO* 24:333-334.

<sup>149</sup> *Comm.* Num. 19:2, *CO* 24:334.

Calvin's Numbers 19 commentary is an appeal to the Father on account of Christ for continued cleansing from guilt.<sup>150</sup>

We find further evidence for human activity in the sacraments when Calvin teaches that the sacraments are attestations of our faith. Again, a sacrament is principally a divine gift, "an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith." Yet "we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels before men."<sup>151</sup> A sacrament, then, is *both* a "testimony of divine grace toward us" *and* an "attestation of our piety toward him," though the former is the primary characteristic.<sup>152</sup> And our attestation is twofold: we attest our piety before God and "our confession"<sup>153</sup> or "religion before men."<sup>154</sup> Like good works, participation in the sacraments is a way for believers to demonstrate *coram hominibus* the vibrancy of their faith.

Calvin's teaching that the sacraments are "works," therefore, is similar to his teaching on faith. As was discussed in chapter 2, Calvin avoids making a work out of faith, which is a gift of God created in us by the Spirit. Faith is "a kind of vessel; for unless we come empty and with the mouth of our soul open to seek Christ's grace, we are not capable of receiving Christ."<sup>155</sup> Sacraments also are divine gifts and not human works. Yet just as believers are active in expressing the faith that God has freely given them in order to receive the benefits of Christ—they must display contrition over their

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<sup>150</sup> Granted, the sacrifice Gerrish finds in Calvin's Eucharistic teaching is not "a merely liturgical sacrifice that occurs only in the course of public worship: [Calvin] is speaking of the entire existence of the Christian, or us the church, an existence that public worship enacts and confirms" (*Grace and Gratitude*, 150). Gerrish states further that Calvin's comments on Num. 19:2-3 "cannot be taken for his central thought on the Eucharistic sacrifice" and that praise is the essence of Calvin's Eucharistic sacrifice. Still, Gerrish believes Calvin's comments on Num. 19:3-2 relate to the Supper, arguing that Calvin's language brought him "amazingly close . . . to the thinking of the more subtle 'papists'" (154).

<sup>151</sup> *Inst.* 4.14.1 (1543/1536), *OS* 5:259.

<sup>152</sup> *Inst.* 4.14.1 (1543/1536,1543), *OS* 5:259. Cf. *Inst.* 4.14.19 (1536,1539), *OS* 5:278. Kolb and Trueman, *Between Wittenberg and Geneva*, 164-165, confirm this, stating that such insistence on both divine and human activity allowed Calvin to occupy ground somewhere between Luther, who argued that God's action is primary in the sacrament, and Zwingli, who emphasized believers' confession of faith. Yet as Kolb and Trueman suggest, Calvin leans more toward Luther, because he prioritizes God's activity (167). Cf. Beeke, "Calvin on Piety," 136.

Melanchthon, *CTT* 255-256,276, *CR* 21:847-848,868, also teaches that the sacraments are primarily testimonies of God's mercy though also means whereby believers confess their faith (cf. *Romans* 113-114, *CR* 15:602-603).

<sup>153</sup> *Inst.* 4.14.13 (1536), *OS* 5:271.

<sup>154</sup> *Inst.* 4.14.19 (1539), *OS* 5:278.

<sup>155</sup> *Inst.* 3.11.7 (1559), *OS* 4:188.



sin and trust in Christ—so also they are active in receiving and celebrating the sacraments. By faith, they accept God’s gifts and, in turn, give him thanks and praise.

### 5.2.3. General Ways of Living Piously

While the elements of the liturgy are chief means whereby believers worship God and demonstrate their piety, there are additional ways that they observe the first table. In his *Mosaic Harmony*, Calvin identifies numerous supplements to the first command that do not seem to relate specifically to the four duties of worship. Moreover, he connects only a handful of these supplements to what God requires of new-covenant believers. One reason Calvin does not connect certain supplements to the Christian life is that such ceremonial and political precepts have been abrogated in Christ. This does not mean, though, that every command fulfilled in Christ is irrelevant to new-covenant believers. Some still contain a perpetual principle even though the outward rite has disappeared. Commenting on the offering of First Fruits, for example, Calvin writes, “This typical rite has now, indeed, ceased, but Paul tells us that the true observation of it still remains, where he exhorts us, whether we eat or drink, to do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31.)”<sup>156</sup> Remarking on the vow of the Nazarites, another supplement to the first command, Calvin criticizes monks who compare themselves to Nazarites and “boast of their angelical perfection” but do not abstain from wine or imbibe moderately. He calls his readers to moderation<sup>157</sup> and suggests that living moderately is integral to holiness.<sup>158</sup> Calvin also sees the precept regarding pollutions arising from issues of bodily fluids as supplemental to the seventh command, stating that it promotes general purity. And according to Paul, Calvin explains, the object of this ceremony is that believers “should cleanse themselves ‘from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit’ (2 Cor. 7:1).”<sup>159</sup> In this instance, piety toward God includes refraining from wickedness, which has wide-reaching implications.

In discussing supplements to the second commandment, Calvin states that the command for the Israelites not to be yoked to the Gentiles has reference to those in Christ, for Paul “embraced in this comparison all the grounds upon which unbelievers insinuate themselves into familiarity with us, to ensnare us by their corrupting influence

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<sup>156</sup> *Comm. Deut. 26:2, CO 24:309. Cf. Comm. Lev. 11:13, CO 24:350.*

<sup>157</sup> *Comm. Num. 6:3, CO 24:305.*

<sup>158</sup> See *Comm. Ex. 25:23, CO 24:408*. Calvin’s teaching here corresponds to that on the proper use of earthly blessings in *Inst.* 3.10.

<sup>159</sup> *Comm. Lev. 15:2, CO 24:329.*

(2 Cor. 6.14).” Consequently, “all ties of connection” with unbelievers should be avoided, when necessary, lest we “be drawn away from [God] by their allurements.”<sup>160</sup> Refraining from communion with unbelievers enables us to serve God more faithfully. Yet Calvin recognizes that we cannot totally avoid dealing with unbelievers and that “our condition now-a-days is more free,” though we still should circumvent occasions that might lure us toward evil.<sup>161</sup>

From these and other supplements, we learn that Calvin believes certain commands contain a principle that applies to believers, helping them to love God. And while Calvin does not explicitly connect these with “good works,” they nevertheless are ways to embrace piety, which Calvin *does* relate to good works.

### 5.3. Love for Neighbor: Obedience to the Second Table

Although the first table takes priority, the second is also a way of worshiping God and performing good works.<sup>162</sup> In fact, Calvin asserts, God tests our obedience to him in giving us the second table.<sup>163</sup> Observing the second table, then, is also a way we prove our faith: when we “live in such justice and equity with our neighbors . . . we demonstrate thereby that we are true children of God.”<sup>164</sup> The reason obedience to the second table proves our *fides* or *timor Deo* is that the affection of the heart is not always visible and hypocrites “continually [busy] themselves with ceremonies.”<sup>165</sup> McKee explains, “the order of precedence” in Calvin’s understanding of worship “is inward faith, outward acts of worship (ceremonies), and then love [toward neighbor]. Unhappily, ceremonies are always susceptible of distortion and hypocrisy. Thus, in

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<sup>160</sup> *Comm. Ex. 34:11, CO 24:548*

<sup>161</sup> *Comm. Ex. 34:11, CO 24:549*. Calvin does not give examples of which occasions believers should avoid and those they may engage. He is concerned primarily with exegeting the text rather than providing examples and may be content to let his readers discern how to apply this teaching.

<sup>162</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments 134, CO 26:309*. Cf. Battles, *Interpreting John Calvin*, 290; Beeke, “Calvin on Piety,” 145; Richard, *Spirituality of John Calvin*, 120.

<sup>163</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments 122,134, CO 26:301,309*.

<sup>164</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments 247, CO 26:392*. Cf. *Inst. 2.8.52 (1539,1559), OS 3:391-392*.

<sup>165</sup> *Inst. 2.8.52 (1539), OS 3:391*. See Zachman, *Word and Image*, 393-395, on hypocrisy and external ceremonies.

some instances, love toward neighbor may better evince faithful worship of God than liturgical or devotional practices.”<sup>166</sup>

Worship of God is supplanted, however, because “it is impossible for men to act as they should toward their neighbors unless they are led by the fear of God.”<sup>167</sup> Love for neighbor must flow from love for God. The two tables are inseparable, though distinguishable.<sup>168</sup> Calvin also implies that anyone supposing he can observe the first table without also observing the second does not truly keep the first.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, “our life shall best conform to God’s will and the prescription of the law when it is in every respect most fruitful for our brethren.” Love toward neighbor is a means whereby we live piously toward God and show that we live according his law generally. Calvin even suggests the good works that prove one righteous refer to deeds of charity, not acts of piety toward God. While Calvin denies that “the essence of righteousness lie[s] more in living innocently with men than in honoring God with piety,” he states that God calls us to exercise “good works toward our neighbor” rather than “confine our duties to himself” because “no benefit can come from us to him.” This is why Paul, Calvin explains, places “the whole perfection of the saints in charity (Eph. 3:19; Col. 3:14).” Although charity is subordinate to worship, we testify “pious fear” of God by observing “right and equity toward men.”<sup>170</sup> While Calvin prioritizes *pietas*, he sees *caritas* as the manner whereby we express our love for God.

Although Calvin sees an inextricable link between the two tables, is it reasonable to say that the duties of the second table are “good works”? We have already established that Calvin relates the heads of the first table (*pietas*, *fides*, etc.) and the second (*caritas*, *iustitia*, etc.) to good works. That the second table is related to good works is further demonstrated in Calvin’s Acts 9:36 commentary, wherein he states that good works,

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<sup>166</sup> McKee, “Context, Contours, Contents,” 74-75. Cf. *idem.*, *Calvin on the Diaconate*, 257,259; Hesselink, *Calvin’s Concept of the Law*, 132-133; André Biéler, *The Social Humanism of Calvin*, trans. Paul T. Fuhrmann (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), 17.

<sup>167</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 134, CO 26:309. Cf. Dancy, “The Transformed Individual,” 141-143.

<sup>168</sup> See *Serm. Ten Commandments* 249, CO 26:393. Cf. McKee, *Calvin on the Diaconate*, chapter 10; Hesselink, *Calvin’s Concept of the Law*, 126-138; Haas, *Equity in Calvin’s Ethics*, 57-58.

<sup>169</sup> See *Serm. Ten Commandments* 248-249, CO 26:393; *Comm. Hos. 6:6-7*, CO 42:329-330, wherein Calvin states that *fides* of itself does not please God since it cannot exist without *caritas*. Cf. Haas, “Calvin’s Ethics,” 102.

<sup>170</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.53 (1539), OS 3:392.

which flow from faith, are “acts of love [*officia charitatis*] by which our neighbours are helped.”<sup>171</sup> Yet what exactly does Calvin mean by *caritas*?

To modern ears, *charity* often connotes monetary donations. While Calvin certainly includes almsgiving under the head *caritas*, he means much more than that. Translators rightly render Calvin’s use of *caritas* as “love,” yet Calvin’s notion of neighborly love is not merely sentimental, involving only warm feelings. Assuredly, Calvin’s understanding of *caritas* necessarily includes genuine affection, as will be demonstrated below, yet his understanding of the term has a wide-ranging meaning. It cannot be reduced to either mere feeling or affectionless giving. As McKee explains, “*Caritas* is not only kindness or sharing, whether alms, hospitality, or vocational service; *caritas* is also justice—legal and personal.”<sup>172</sup> For this reason, Calvin frequently refers to the second table, which summarizes love for neighbor, as *iustitia*.

This is evinced in his comments on Ezekiel 18:5-9, which sets forth the concepts of “justice and judgment.” According to Calvin, these are aspects of *caritas*, general duties of the second table. In Scripture, *judgment* means “rectitude,” but when joined with *justice*, it means more than simply “uprightness.” Both *justice* and *judgment*, when either are taken alone, mean “equity, fidelity, and integrity.” Calvin explains that doing justice is to “abstain altogether from fraud and violence, and deal with our brethren as we wish them to deal with us.” But *judgment*, as Ezekiel uses it conjointly with *justice*, means more. It signifies that we “desire to benefit [and] defend our brethren, when unjustly oppressed, as far as we can, and when we oppose the lust and violence of those who would overthrow all that is right and holy.” Stated differently, “To do judgment and justice is nothing else than to abstain from all injury by cultivating good faith and equity with our neighbours: *then* to defend all good causes, and to take the innocent under our patronage when we see them unjustly injured and oppressed.”<sup>173</sup> Being just or upright, or obeying the second table, means actively seeking the welfare of others in addition to refraining from committing harm.<sup>174</sup> This is the essence of *caritas* for Calvin.

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<sup>171</sup> *Comm.* Acts 9:36, *COR* II/XII.1:287. Cf. *Inst.* 3.18.6 (1539), *OS* 4:276, wherein Calvin singles out charity when discussing rewards for works.

<sup>172</sup> McKee, *Calvin on the Deaconate*, 252. Cf. Chung, *Spirituality and Social Ethics*, 83; Hesselink, *Calvin’s Concept of the Law*, 131; Haas, *Equity in Calvin’s Ethics*, chapter 4; Billings, *Calvin*, 167-169.

<sup>173</sup> *Comm.* Ezek. 18:5-9, *CO* 40:426.

<sup>174</sup> See Dancy, “The Transformed Individual,” 145, 197.

Now we turn to the specific duties of charity in Calvin's thought. In doing so, we will analyze Calvin's treatment of the second table and other Scripture passages that he relates to the duties promoted in these commands.

### 5.3.1. Honoring Authority Figures

Calvin teaches that the second table begins with the command for children to honor their parents. This command also requires that we honor other authority figures.<sup>175</sup> We are to obey our parents and earthly rulers because God has inscribed upon them "a mark of His glory" and they are "the ministers of His authority."<sup>176</sup> As God's representatives, authority figures have certain rights, and those under their authority are to pay them due honor. Honoring authorities, then, is a way for believers to practice *iustitia*, rendering to others their rights.

Explaining what it means to "honor" parents, Calvin lists three specific duties. First, children should "reverence" their parents—namely, recognize their authority.<sup>177</sup> "Obedience" is the second duty, which calls children to "comply with their [parent's] commands, and allow themselves to be governed by them."<sup>178</sup> Yet Scripture sets conditions on the extent to which parents should be obeyed. Paul, Calvin explains, "does not simply exhort children to obey their parents, but adds the restriction, 'in the Lord;' whereby he indicates that, if a father enjoins anything unrighteous, obedience is freely to be denied him."<sup>179</sup> Third, children "should endeavour to repay what they owe to [their parents], and thus heartily devote to them themselves and their services."<sup>180</sup> With gratitude, children ought "to relieve the poverty of their parents, and to aid their necessities."<sup>181</sup>

Obedying authority figures has broader implications than simply rendering to them their due. Calvin asserts that "human society cannot be maintained in its integrity" unless those "who are set over others by God's ordinance" are honored.<sup>182</sup> By submitting to authority, we benefit society.

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<sup>175</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:12, CO 24:605-606.*

<sup>176</sup> *Comm. Ex. 22:28, CO 24:609. Cf. Sermon. Ten Commandments 138, CO 26:312.*

<sup>177</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:12, CO 24:603. Cf. Sermon. Ten Commandments 138, CO 26:312.*

<sup>178</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:12, CO 24:603.*

<sup>179</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:12, CO 24:603-604. Cf. Sermon. Ten Commandments 143, CO 26:316.*

<sup>180</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:12, CO 24:603.*

<sup>181</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:12, CO 24:604. Cf. 1545 Catechism in Tracts 2:63, OS 2:104-105, wherein Calvin also outlines the heads of honor.*

<sup>182</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:12, CO 24:602-603. Cf. Comm. Deut. 16:18, CO 24:610.*

Calvin's discussion of the blessings promised to those who obey authorities resembles his discussion of rewards for works. Calvin writes, "God gives us a proof of His favour in this life, when we have been grateful to those to whom we are indebted for it." And it is unjust for God to "greatly prolong their life who despise those progenitors by whom they have been brought into it."<sup>183</sup> Calvin also emphasizes Scripture's promise that life may go well for those who keep this command. God works "variously and unequally," giving certain "temporal rewards" to those who "discharged the duties of piety towards their parents." Contrariwise, "many who have been ungrateful and unkind to their parents only prolong their life as a punishment."<sup>184</sup> Yet this does not mean that those who die prematurely are necessarily divinely accursed. Rather, sometimes "the more a man is loved by God the more quickly he is removed out of this life."<sup>185</sup> The promise given to obedient children, then, pertains ultimately to God's care for the soul.<sup>186</sup> Indeed, "a better compensation is secured in heaven for believers, who have been deprived on earth of transitory blessings." Still, Calvin's point is clear: those who honor authority figures, and thereby God, are rewarded for their obedience. Moreover, if one desires to live righteously, he must honor those in authority, provided they promote righteousness.<sup>187</sup> In doing so, he renders what is due not only to those over him but also to God, since earthly authorities are his representatives.

### **5.3.2. Promoting Others' Physical and Economic Wellbeing**

For Calvin, integral to practicing charity is maintaining others' physical and economic wellbeing. One way this is accomplished is by promoting our neighbors' physical safety. Expounding the command against murder, Calvin writes, "The Lord has bound mankind together by a certain unity; hence each man ought to concern himself with the safety of all."<sup>188</sup> Here, and elsewhere, Calvin teaches that all humans share a common bond, because all are made in God's image. We therefore ought to care for one another. This means not only that "all violence, injury, and any harmful thing at all that may injure our neighbor's body are forbidden to us," but also that "we are accordingly commanded, if we find anything of use to us in saving our neighbors' lives, faithfully to

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<sup>183</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:12, CO 24:604.*

<sup>184</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:12, CO 24:605.*

<sup>185</sup> 1545 *Catechism in Tracts 2:63, OS 2:105.*

<sup>186</sup> 1545 *Catechism in Tracts 2:63-64, OS 2:105.*

<sup>187</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:12, CO 24:605.*

<sup>188</sup> *Inst. 2.8.39 (1539), OS 3:379.*

employ it; if there is anything that makes for their peace, to see to it; if anything harmful, to ward it off; if they are in any danger, to lend a helping hand.”<sup>189</sup> God “did not simply create us to abstain from evil.” Rather, “Our Lord wants us to go to the trouble of helping each other, insofar as our neighbor’s life ought to be as precious to us as it is to him.”<sup>190</sup> This also means that we should strive to live peaceably with all people.<sup>191</sup>

Another way to seek others’ physical wellbeing is by keeping the injunction against theft. This precept, Calvin argues, includes more than a restriction against unjust financial or material gain. While it requires us to “make only honest and lawful gain,”<sup>192</sup> it also teaches God’s people to use their justly earned resources to benefit others:

Let this be our constant aim: faithfully to help all men by our counsel and aid to keep what is theirs, in so far as we can; but if we have to deal with faithless and deceitful men, let us be prepared to give up something of our own rather than to contend with them. And not this alone: but let us share the necessity of those whom we see pressed by the difficulty of affairs, assisting them in their need with our abundance. Finally, let each one see to what extent he is in duty bound to others, and let him pay his debt faithfully.<sup>193</sup>

This means not only that employers “should freely and voluntarily pay what is right,”<sup>194</sup> but also that the wealthy should “constantly exercise humanity and mercy in the relief of the poor.”<sup>195</sup> This command ultimately calls us to help others in financial, material, and physical need.<sup>196</sup>

One way believers obey this command is by acting generously toward others. Remarking on Acts 9:36, Calvin classifies almsgiving as a chief good work.<sup>197</sup> And he

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<sup>189</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.39 (mainly 1539), *OS* 3:379-380. Calvin also states that we “violate the law” if we not only hate our neighbor but also fail to “defend his safety” according to our “means and opportunity.” Such failure is “inhumanity.” Cf. *Serm. Ten Commandments*, 153,156-161; *Comm. Ex.* 20:13/Deut. 5:17, *CO* 24:612.

<sup>190</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 163, *CO* 26:331.

<sup>191</sup> *Comm. Ex.* 20:13/Deut. 5:17, *CO* 24:612.

<sup>192</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.46 (1539), *OS* 3:385.

<sup>193</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.46 (1536,1539), *OS* 3:385. Cf. *Comm. Ex.* 20:15/Deut. 5:19, *CO* 24:669.

<sup>194</sup> *Comm. Deut.* 25:4, *CO* 24:672. On the necessity of integrity in relating to the poor, see Dancy, “The Transformed Individual,” 150-151. Cf. Chung, *Spirituality and Social Ethics*, 108.

<sup>195</sup> *Comm. Ex.* 22:25/Lev. 25:35-38/Deut. 23:19-20, *CO* 24:679.

<sup>196</sup> Haas, *Equity in Calvin’s Ethics*, 60-62, demonstrates that neighborly love is directed especially toward the poor.

<sup>197</sup> *Comm. Acts* 9:36, *COR II/XII*.1:287.

indicates that hospitality is, as McKee remarks, a “principal virtue of love.”<sup>198</sup> The chief duty of love, Calvin explains, “is to do good to those from whom we expect the least recompense” and “hospitality . . . is not the lowest sort of love.”<sup>199</sup> One reason hospitality as a chief expression of charity is that the host expects no repayment from the guest.<sup>200</sup> But hospitality, when shown in Christ’s name, is not overlooked by God. Commenting on Hebrews 13:2, Calvin states that hospitality is “especially near [God’s] heart” and receives a special reward, for we receive “Christ Himself when we receive the poor in His Name.”<sup>201</sup>

Thus, Christians work “not simply that they may gain a livelihood, but that they may also help their brethren in their necessity.”<sup>202</sup> Scripture teaches that “whatever benefits we obtain from the Lord have been entrusted to us” for “the common good of the church” and that “lawful use of all benefits consists in a liberal and kindly sharing of them with others.” Moreover, “all the gifts we possess have been bestowed by God and entrusted to us on condition that they be distributed for our neighbors’ benefit.”<sup>203</sup> God gives us the ability to do good and has destined us to be “ministers of his beneficence.” Ultimately, God is the one who “bestows all these things,” yet he does so by human ministration.<sup>204</sup> The right use of money and material possessions is ultimately directed toward helping others in need. In fact, we are to prioritize the needs of others above our own.<sup>205</sup> And unless one practices “liberality” and “does not relieve the necessities of his brethren when he can,” he is “deservedly held to be unrighteous.”<sup>206</sup> Generosity, therefore, is required of those who profess faith.

Yet this command requires us to not only live generously, but also oppose injustice. Preaching on the eighth command, Calvin explains what Scripture means by “justice and judgment.” Justice requires that we “render [to] each his due,” and

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<sup>198</sup> McKee, *Calvin on the Deaconate*, 250. My discussion of Calvin’s teaching on generosity is in part indebted to McKee (244-253), who addresses some of the passages I discuss.

<sup>199</sup> *Comm.* Rom. 12:13, *COR II/XIII*:265.

<sup>200</sup> *Comm.* Gen. 18:2, *CO* 23:250.

<sup>201</sup> *Comm.* Heb. 13:2, *CO* 55:187.

<sup>202</sup> *Comm.* 2 Thess. 3:12, *CO* 52:214-215. Cf. *Comm.* Eph. 4:28, *COR II/XVI*:248-249. See Chung, *Spirituality and Social Ethics*, 107, on vocation and the common good.

<sup>203</sup> *Inst.* 3.7.5 (1539), *OS* 4:155. Cf. Dancy, “The Transformed Individual,” 148.

<sup>204</sup> 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:70, *OS* 2:113. See Chung, *Spirituality and Social Ethics*, 112-113, on stewarding God’s gifts for others’ benefit.

<sup>205</sup> *Inst.* 3.7.5 (1539), *OS* 4:156.

<sup>206</sup> *Comm.* Ex. 22:25/Lev. 25:35-38/Deut. 23:19-20, *CO* 24:679.



judgment that we “neither consent to evil, [n]or allow anyone to fool the poor who do not have any means of maintaining themselves.” When we fail to help the oppressed, we consent to evil and befriend “those who steal when we do not attempt to repress them.” The “principle of charity” requires that we not only make an honest living and act generously toward others, but also protect our neighbors from injustice.<sup>207</sup>

### 5.3.3. Protecting Others’ Reputations

Another duty of charity is protecting our neighbor’s reputation, a practice captured in the command against false witness. “Since God (who is truth) abhors a lie, we must practice truth without deceit toward one another.” This means we ought “not malign anyone with slanders or false charges, nor harm his substance by falsehood, in short, injure him by unbridled evilspeaking and impudence.”<sup>208</sup> This precept prohibits not just the invention but also the confirmation of any speech that puts our neighbor in trouble and danger.<sup>209</sup> Yet, as he does with the other commands, Calvin detects in this proscription a corresponding prescription: that we “faithfully help everyone as much as we can in affirming the truth, in order to protect the integrity of his name and possessions.”<sup>210</sup>

This command also calls us to maintain unity with others. God has given us language “for the purpose of nurturing tender love and fraternity with each other.”<sup>211</sup> Further, we ought to refrain from falsehood because “God intends for friendship to be established between men and for no one to be tormented with regard to his honor or property.”<sup>212</sup> Right speech seeks to protect the reputation and wellbeing of others and promote and maintain harmony between all people. When we slander, discredit, or argue with others, we break “the bond of charity between men.”<sup>213</sup>

Although the second table has specific reference to our dealings with others, Calvin teaches that this command also requires us to embrace and defend God’s truth.

<sup>207</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 200, *CO* 26:358.

<sup>208</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.47 (1539), *OS* 3:386. Cf. *Comm. Ex.* 20:16/Deut. 5:20, *CO* 24:713.

<sup>209</sup> *Comm. Ex.* 23:1, *CO* 24:715; *Comm. Lev.* 19:16, *CO* 24:7.

<sup>210</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.47 (1539), *OS* 3:386. Cf. *Serm. Ten Commandments* 205,207, *CO* 26:360,361; 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:66, *OS* 2:108.

<sup>211</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 216, *CO* 26:369. See Zachman, *Image and Word*, 379-381, on the importance of language for human communion and unity.

<sup>212</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 206, *CO* 26:361.

<sup>213</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 205, *CO* 26:360.

Consequently, when we see truth oppressed, we “must not tolerate it.”<sup>214</sup> The same measure of zeal that we direct to maintaining unity with our neighbors should be given with respect to God, “that his truth [may] abide in its fullness and that it may be maintained in order for his reign to be active in our midst.”<sup>215</sup> Notice the purpose stated here for why we maintain God’s truth: that God may reign in our midst. Apparently, in defending and promoting God’s truth, we also serve our neighbors. Others are benefited by the active presence of God when we combat falsehood and uphold truth.

#### 5.3.4. Preserving Chastity and Modesty

Preserving chastity and modesty is another duty of *caritas/iustitia*. The command against adultery not only forbids licentiousness, but also “tends to the exaltation of chastity.”<sup>216</sup> *Prima facie*, Calvin’s remarks on this command seem to have particular reference to *pietas*, since he frequently teaches that sexual promiscuity disapproves one before God. Put positively, “Those who desire to approve themselves to God, should be pure ‘from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit’ (2 Cor. 7:1).”<sup>217</sup> Again, Calvin teaches that adherence to the second table proves one’s *fides* or *pietas*, and living chastely honors God. Conversely, licentiousness dishonors God: “when a man indulges in prostitution, it’s the same as if he were to [rip up] the body of Jesus Christ.”<sup>218</sup> Chastity, then, is an aspect of the sanctified life. Indeed, marriage helps one to pursue godliness; it helps to mortify the flesh and moderate one’s desires.<sup>219</sup> The command against adultery

<sup>214</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 218, CO 26:370.

<sup>215</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 218, CO 26:371.

<sup>216</sup> *Comm. Deut.* 22:13, CO 24:656.

<sup>217</sup> *Comm. Ex.* 20:14/Deut. 5:18, CO 24:644.

<sup>218</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 172, CO 26:338. The translator renders Calvin’s use of *deschirer* as “rape,” stating in a footnote that it captures Calvin’s meaning more forcefully than does the common translation (“rip up” or “shred”). However, “rip up” is indeed best here, which I have inserted, since Calvin says several lines later that such sexual immorality “breaks [rompoit]” Christ’s body into pieces. (Golding translates “*deschiroit le corps de Iesus Christ*” as “tore Christ’s body asunder” in *Serm. Deut.* 5:18 [226].) Further, Calvin uses *deschirer* in the common sense in *Serm.* 1 Cor. 10:8-9, CO 49:624, stating that by sexual immorality we “rip the body of our Lord Jesus Christ into pieces [*deschirer le corps de nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ par pieces*].” He also uses *deschirer* in *Institution de la religion chrestienne* (Geneva: Jean Crispin, 1560), 3.16.1, when stating that separating sanctification from justification tears Christ into pieces. Thus, it seems Calvin is implying that sexual immorality is just as unthinkable as, and perhaps an act of, separating justification and sanctification.

Cf. Thomas Zickgraf, *Die Sexualethik Calvins* (München, 1970), 13-14, who remarks that fornication violates God’s design, dishonors Christ, harms oneself, and causes societal disorder.

<sup>219</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 179-180, CO 26:342-343. Focusing on the mortifying nature of marriage, Hesselink *Calvin’s Concept of the Law*, 123, states that Calvin “views

calls us to “restrain ourselves in effect from all promiscuity” and “maintain our senses chaste that we might be chaste in both eyes and heart.”<sup>220</sup> Contrariwise, promiscuous persons not only dishonor God but also “sin against their own body,” as Paul teaches (1 Cor. 6:18), and contaminate themselves.<sup>221</sup> And in order to refrain from licentiousness, Calvin explains, we should “conduct ourselves modestly in both speech and deeds.”<sup>222</sup>

Yet Calvin also indicates that sexual propriety and modesty uphold justice.<sup>223</sup> This is evinced in his comments on adultery, wherein he teaches that the victim of adultery (the faithful spouse) and his/her family are denied certain rights. In explaining why Mosaic Law deemed adultery a capital offense, Calvin states that the faithful spouse “is grossly injured, and the dishonour descends to the offspring, and an adulterine race is substituted in place of the legitimate one, whilst the inheritance is transferred to strangers, and thus bastards unlawfully possess themselves of the family name.”<sup>224</sup> In teaching that adultery robs the victim of his/her rights, Calvin implies that chastity preserves justice and maintains what rightfully belongs to a married person and the family. Further, the command against adultery requires that a husband and wife foster and maintain love toward another, that they may not only guard against temptation but also establish “mutual confidence” and preserve fidelity.<sup>225</sup> Chastity requires both abstinence from sexual misconduct and the cultivation of intimacy between married persons so they may build joint trust and devotion.

We find additional evidence that chastity promotes justice in Calvin’s teaching on divorce. Commenting on Deuteronomy 22:13-17, he explains that a man disgraces his wife when he divorces her on false pretense. Thus, God prescribes “a method

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marriage rather negatively.” This does not fully account for passages like *Comm. Deut. 24:5*, *CO 24:652*, which Hesselink cites. Therein, Calvin advises that newly married couples establish “mutual love” and “enjoy” themselves. That Calvin affirmed a positive role of marriage is also reflected in his personal life. Writing to Pierre Viret on 7 April 1549, Calvin described the recent loss of his wife, Idelle, as “exceedingly painful,” because she was “the best companion of my life” (*Tracts 5:216*, *CO 13:230*). Cf. Zickgraf, *Die Sexualethik Calvins*, 17, who argues that Calvin holds a positive view of marriage due to its “natürliche Gutheit,” which outweighs the negative consequences of sin on marriage; and Derrick Scherwin Bailey, *Mann und Frau im christlichen Denken* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1959), 153, who says marriage for Calvin is a high calling.

<sup>220</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments 171-172*, *CO 26:337*. Cf. Zickgraf, *Die Sexualethik Calvins*, 14, on outward and inward purity.

<sup>221</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:14/Deut. 5:18*, *CO 24:644*.

<sup>222</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments 177*, *CO 26:341*.

<sup>223</sup> On love/justice/equity in marriage, see Haas, *Equity in Calvin’s Ethics*, 99-100.

<sup>224</sup> *Comm. Deut. 22:22*, *CO 24:648*.

<sup>225</sup> *Comm. Deut. 24:5*, *CO 24:652*.

whereby the integrity of the woman should be safe from the calumnies of an ungodly and cruel husband.” However, if the wife is found guilty of promiscuity, the husband may divorce her because it is “just to give relief to an honest man.”<sup>226</sup> Husbands and wives should give each other mutual, monogamous love for the preservation of marital fidelity and trust,<sup>227</sup> and of their reputations and livelihood. The unmarried should live chastely for similar reasons, that they not only live purely but also promote justice at the societal level. Chastity helps preserve the general wellness of oneself and others.

### 5.3.5. Promoting Others’ Spiritual Wellbeing

Thus far, it may seem that Calvin’s understanding of *caritas* pertains primarily to the physical wellbeing of others—their safety, health, livelihood, reputation, etc.—to the neglect of their spiritual wellbeing. This is not true. Assuredly, Calvin believes the command against murder, for example, requires us to maintain our neighbor’s security. Yet it requires more: “if there is so much concern for the safety of his body, from this we may infer how much zeal and effort we owe the safety of the soul, which far excels the body in the Lord’s sight.”<sup>228</sup> The precept ultimately necessitates that we care for our neighbor’s soul, since the soul is the “proper seat” of God’s image, the “nobler part” of human nature.<sup>229</sup>

One way believers care for others’ spiritual wellbeing is by intercession. Although prayer is the chief exercise of *fides*, it is also a means for practicing *caritas*. And while we should not pray *to* the saints,<sup>230</sup> we should pray *for* other believers. Calvin writes, “For as [prayers] gush forth from the emotion of love, in which we willingly and freely embrace one another as members of one body, so also are they related to the unity of the Head. When, therefore, those intercessions are also made in Christ’s name, what else do they attest but that no one can be helped by any prayers at all save when Christ intercede?”<sup>231</sup> Here again, we encounter language of *helping*, though Calvin focuses mainly on prayer and its efficacy through Christ’s priestly intercession. Yet this does not nullify what Calvin teaches elsewhere, that we are to assist others by outward deeds.

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<sup>226</sup> *Comm.* Deut. 22:13, *CO* 24:656.

<sup>227</sup> *Comm.* Deut. 24:5, *CO* 24:652.

<sup>228</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.40 (1539), *OS* 3:380.

<sup>229</sup> See “2.1. Original Humanity.”

<sup>230</sup> See *Inst.* 3.20.22 (1536,1539,1559), *OS* 4:327-328.

<sup>231</sup> *Inst.* 3.20.19 (1539), *OS* 4:324. On Calvin’s understanding of intercession, especially in corporate worship, see McKee, “Calvin and Praying,” 130-140.

Both deeds and prayers are necessary for truly helping our neighbors. And by intercession, believers “commend one another’s salvation [*salutem*] to God.”<sup>232</sup> Here, Calvin uses *salus* in a broad sense. While he sometimes uses *salus* with specific reference to justification, he often uses it to capture the believer’s entire soteriological experience—both reconciliation and renewal, including eschatological glorification. Thus, when believers commend each other’s salvation in prayer, they promote each other’s entire spiritual wellbeing.<sup>233</sup>

Scripture also calls believers to pray for the salvation of unbelievers.<sup>234</sup> Just as the *imago Dei* within all people is the basis for our just dealings with others, so it is for our intercession.<sup>235</sup> Preaching on 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Calvin explains that by interceding for others, we “extend our charity/love and care toward all, great and small, familiar and unknown.”<sup>236</sup> Commenting on 2:4, he writes, “There is a duty of love to care a great deal for the salvation of all those to whom God extends His call to testify to this by godly prayers.”<sup>237</sup> Intercession itself is an act of *caritas*. And this act ultimately seeks others’ salvation, that God would “have mercy on all” and “gather us together in the heavenly inheritance.”<sup>238</sup>

Caring for the souls of others also takes form in more direct communication with others. Keeping the command against false witness includes not simply protecting the reputation of others but also warning others of their sin and persuading them toward the good.<sup>239</sup> The reason we reprove others is that they may shun their vices and that we may “secure their salvation and welfare.”<sup>240</sup> This does not mean that we act harshly toward those who have strayed, but that we “use kindness and forbearance toward our neighbors, as, under similar conditions, we would want them to do [the same] toward us.”<sup>241</sup> We do not want them to “lose courage,” Calvin explains.<sup>242</sup> Further, “brotherly

<sup>232</sup> *Inst.* 3.20.19 (1539), *OS* 4:324.

<sup>233</sup> Cf. Richard, *Spirituality of John Calvin*, 127, who states that our sanctification is advanced by the prayers of other Christians.

<sup>234</sup> *Comm.* 1 Tim. 2:1, *CO* 52:265; *Comm.* 1 Tim. 2:4, *CO* 52:268-269.

<sup>235</sup> McKee, “Calvin and Praying,” 133.

<sup>236</sup> *Serm.* 11 on 1 Tim 2:1-2, *CO* 53:125, translated by McKee, “Calvin and Praying,” 133.

<sup>237</sup> *Comm.* 1 Tim. 2:4, *CO* 52:269.

<sup>238</sup> *Serm.* 11 on 1 Tim 2:1-2, *CO* 53:127, translated by McKee, “Calvin and Praying,” 134.

<sup>239</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 212, *CO* 26:366. Cf. *Comm.* Lev. 19:17, *CO* 24:716.

<sup>240</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 216, *CO* 26:369.

<sup>241</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 214, *CO* 26:367.

love” ought to inspire us to the end of correcting our neighbors who have fallen into vice so that they may once again walk in God’s ways.<sup>243</sup>

It is nearly impossible to retrieve all the ways Calvin conceived that believers could or should exercise *caritas*. Yet we may safely deduce from his principle of opposites and general understanding of *caritas* as doing good to others that he understands *caritas* in broad terms. This is confirmed by his comments on Hebrews 6:10, wherein he describes the good works or “labour of love” that God rewards: “We are not to spare ourselves from labour if we want to do our duty to our neighbors. We are not to help them financially only, but with advice, and by our efforts and in all kinds of ways. We must show great zeal, and put up with many annoyances, and sometimes undergo many hazards. Whoever wants to engage in tasks of loving must be prepared for a laborious way of life.”<sup>244</sup> Loving others requires commitment and difficult work, which is quite extensive, taking on many forms.<sup>245</sup> *Caritas* seems to be any act performed to assist others in need, whether physically or spiritually.

Further, Calvin teaches that *caritas* should be extended to *all* indiscriminately. Discussing the Parable of the Good Samaritan, he states that Christ himself taught that “the term ‘neighbor’ includes even the most remote person,” and that we should not limit the “precept of love” to those dear to us.<sup>246</sup> This does not mean that we will not assist more frequently those closely connected to us. God leads us to extend *caritas* more toward those connected to us “by the ties of kinship, of acquaintanceship, or of neighborhood.”<sup>247</sup> Moreover, we are to practice charity in greater effort toward other believers, who are “connected to us by a closer bond.”<sup>248</sup> Still, Calvin asserts that “we ought to embrace the whole human race without exception in a single feeling of love; here there is no distinction between barbarian and Greek, worthy and unworthy, friend and enemy, since all should be contemplated in God, not in themselves.”<sup>249</sup> Calvin then

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<sup>242</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 216, *CO* 26:369.

<sup>243</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 214, *CO* 26:367.

<sup>244</sup> *Comm. Heb.* 6:10, *CO* 55:75.

<sup>245</sup> On the “demanding” work of neighborly love, especially of that toward the poor, see Billings, *Calvin*, 169.

<sup>246</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.55 (1536,1539), *OS* 3:393. Cf. *Comm. Lev.* 19:33, *CO* 24:673-674, wherein Calvin also explains the broad meaning of “neighbor.”

<sup>247</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.55 (1539), *OS* 3:393.

<sup>248</sup> *Comm. Rom.* 12:13, *COR II/XII*:265. Cf. Billings, *Calvin*, 165,170-184; Dancy, “The Transformed Individual,” 144.

<sup>249</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.55 (1539), *OS* 3:393-394. Cf. 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:68, *OS* 2:110; *Comm. Rom.* 12:13, *COR II/XII*:265.

states that we must not neglect this principle, because God “bids us extend to all men the love we bear to him.” And we are to love our neighbors unconditionally. No matter what sort of man our neighbor is—righteous or wicked, friend or enemy—“we must yet love him because we love God.”<sup>250</sup>

The reason we ought to love and help each other is twofold. First, God has united all humans with a common bond, since all are created in his image. Indeed, we act “contrary to nature” if we “hate our [own] flesh.”<sup>251</sup> The natural bond between all humans is the most basic reason we should seek each other’s wellbeing.<sup>252</sup> Yet there is an even stronger reason that believers should exercise *caritas*: “they must remember that they are members of our Lord Jesus Christ and that there exists a more strict and sacred bond of nature which is common in all human beings.”<sup>253</sup> For Calvin, there are anthropological and christological reasons why believers should exercise love toward others, both inside and outside the church. We also find a *theological* basis: believers should “imitate their heavenly Father” by bestowing kindness upon both the worthy and unworthy.<sup>254</sup> We should extend kindness indiscriminately because God has done so toward us and because loving our neighbor is a way we express our love for God.<sup>255</sup>

<sup>250</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.55 (1539), *OS* 3:394. Cf. *Inst.* 2.8.56-57 (mainly 1536, 1539), *OS* 394-396, wherein Calvin opposes Catholics whom he believed neglected Scripture’s teaching on loving our enemies.

<sup>251</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 165, *CO* 26:333. Cf. *Inst.* 3.7.6 (1539), *OS* 4:156.

<sup>252</sup> On the *imago Dei* as the basis for Calvin’s call to justice/charity, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Hearing the Call: Liturgy, Justice, Church, and World*, eds. Mark R. Gornik and Gregory Thompson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 122-127; Zachman, “Deny Yourself,” 472. Karl Barth and Emil Brunner criticized Calvin’s understanding of neighborly love. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), I/II:419-420, claimed that it is a more Stoic than biblical doctrine. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation*, Dogmatics, Vol. 3, trans. David Cairns and T.H.L. Parker (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1960), 310, criticized both Calvin and Zwingli for conflating *agape* with a “rational love for man” and instead favored Luther’s position, which he believed captures “the spontaneously individualizing nature of *agape*.” Contra Barth and Brunner, Hesselink, *Calvin’s Concept of the Law*, 136-137, shows that Calvin believes we are to love all people not on account of “a static quality of their own” but because they bear God’s image. Billings, *Calvin*, 166-167, follows Hesselink in critiquing Barth, showing that Calvin’s rationale for indiscriminate love for others is grounded more in Christian *theology* than Stoic anthropology.

<sup>253</sup> *Serm. Ten Commandments* 165, *CO* 26:333.

<sup>254</sup> *Comm. Ex.* 23:4, *CO* 24:684. Cf. Haas, “Calvin’s Ethics,” 99; Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 250: “We are to regard other people in the same way God has looked upon us in justification”; Zachman, “Deny Yourself,” 473.

<sup>255</sup> Hesselink, *Calvin’s Concept of the Law*, 136-137, also identifies anthropological, Christological, and *theological* bases for *caritas*. Wolterstorff, *Hearing the Call*, 127, argues that Calvin also demands love/justice because injustice wounds God since it wounds God’s

## 5.4. The Priority of Genuine Affection

Our discussion thus far is incomplete without analyzing in what sense good works—obedience to God’s law—are considered good/righteous. We discussed this in part in chapter 3, wherein we discovered that good works please God because he graciously accepts them in Christ. While regenerate humans are able to pursue and perform righteousness, they do so only relatively. Consequently, their good works are imperfect and thus unacceptable to God *in se*. Therefore, tainted good works must be justified if they are to please God. While our works are considered good *to a certain extent* because *some* good resides in us by the Spirit, the ultimate reason they are considered good is God’s gratuitous mercy.<sup>256</sup>

Yet Calvin also teaches that our works are considered good because they flow from sincerity of heart, a genuine desire to please to God.<sup>257</sup> Thus, Calvin’s understanding of why works are considered good is distinct from Luther’s. Luther focuses primarily on faith as the reason works are considered good. Moreover, he states that if a man “finds his heart confident that it pleases God, then the work is good.” However, “if the confidence is not there, or if he has any doubt about it, then the work is not good.”<sup>258</sup> Calvin certainly teaches that faith is requisite for both regeneration and justification, with the latter pertaining to both our persons and works. Yet sincerity of heart, which is restored to us in Christ, is another reason why our works are deemed good and thus acceptable *coram Deo*.

Calvin evinces this in his discussion of the law in *Institutio* book 2, wherein he prioritizes sincerity of heart.<sup>259</sup> He writes, “Through the law man’s life is molded not only to outward honesty but to inward and spiritual righteousness.”<sup>260</sup> As Wallace explains, “True righteousness, then, is to respond with the whole heart to the outward commandments.”<sup>261</sup> The reason God desires inward uprightness and not just external

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image bearer, thus implying a *theological* reason for *caritas/iustitia*. Cf. O’Donovan, “Human Dignity and Human Justice,” 136.

<sup>256</sup> See “3.2. Double Justification.”

<sup>257</sup> Cf. Zachman, *Image and Word*, 397: “[God] only accepts our external works if they are rooted in godly affection.”

<sup>258</sup> *Treatise on Good Works* in *LW* 44:25, *WA* 6:206.

<sup>259</sup> Cf. *Comm.* 1 John 1:7, *COR* II/XX:147; *Comm.* 1 John 3:5, *COR* II/XX:188-189; *Comm.* Ps. 106:3, *CO* 32:116.

<sup>260</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.6 (1539), *OS* 3:348.

<sup>261</sup> Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 118.



obedience is that the law is spiritual in nature. The law is spiritual because the Lawgiver himself is spirit. Paul articulates this clearly, Calvin explains, when he affirms that “‘the law is spiritual’ [Romans 7:14].” God “not only demands obedience of soul, mind, and will, but requires an angelic purity, which, cleansed of every pollution of the flesh, savors of nothing but the spirit.”<sup>262</sup> And Christ, the perfect interpreter of the law, reveals that the law pertains preeminently to the heart when he “declares an unchaste glance at a woman to be adultery [Matthew 5:28]” and “testifies that ‘anyone who hates his brother is a murderer’ [1 John 3:15].”<sup>263</sup> Moreover, in refuting the notion of venial sin, Calvin reminds us that Scripture commands us to love God with our whole being and states that if all our faculties are not directed toward loving God, then we have “abandoned obedience to the law.”<sup>264</sup>

When reading Calvin’s discussion of the Christian life in book 3, we discover that in treating topics like repentance, confession, satisfactions, self-denial, cross-bearing, charity, the proper attitude toward this earthly life, and meditation upon the future life, he prioritizes sincerity/purity of heart. Assuredly, he admits that particular external actions are integral to sanctification: “there are certain outward exercises that we use privately as remedies, either to humble ourselves or to tame our flesh,” and “publicly as testimony of repentance.”<sup>265</sup> Yet such acts are not the principal part of repentance.<sup>266</sup> Quoting Joel 2:12 and James 4:8, he explains that repentance/sanctification ultimately consists in turning to the Lord *in heart*.<sup>267</sup> Attitude is more important than action.<sup>268</sup>

Calvin also teaches that sincere reverence for God must be accompanied by sincere love for neighbor. Further, if “the duties of love [*charitatis officii*]” are to effectively mortify the flesh, they must proceed from “a sincere feeling of love [*amoris*

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<sup>262</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.6 (1536,1539), *OS* 3:349. Cf. *Serm. Ten Commandments* 159, *CO* 26:327-328.

<sup>263</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.7 (1536), *OS* 3:349.

<sup>264</sup> *Inst.* 2.8.58 (1539), *OS* 3:396. Cf. Hass, “Calvin’s Ethics,” 101, on the spiritual nature of the law.

<sup>265</sup> *Inst.* 3.3.16 (1543), *OS* 4:73. Cf. *Inst.* 3.3.16 (1559), *OS* 4:72: “external evidences . . . mark sincere repentance.”

<sup>266</sup> *Inst.* 3.3.17 (1539), *OS* 4:74.

<sup>267</sup> *Inst.* 3.3.16 (1559), *OS* 4:73.

<sup>268</sup> Yet as Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 216, rightly states, while Calvin emphasizes “that internal dispositions and intentions are what truly matters before God, the Law does not permit one to forsake external actions.” Cf. Richard, *Spirituality of John Calvin*, 121.

*affectu*].”<sup>269</sup> One could potentially perform all the duties of charity but perform them amiss, since such acts must flow from genuine heartfelt love. Deeds toward others are considered good only if they are performed from a pure heart that genuinely seeks others’ wellbeing.

Sincerity of heart also includes “simplicity of mind, free from guile and feigning, the opposite of a double heart.”<sup>270</sup> Such singlemindedness must be unmixed with selfish ambition. Works of justice, for instance, are considered such only when performed with the singular motive to please God rather than a desire for personal gain. In discussing the unregenerate who are praised for their virtue *coram hominibus*, which certainly preserves society, Calvin explains that they are not considered good/righteous *coram Deo* because they do not possess faith and are driven more by selfishness than a genuine love for righteousness.<sup>271</sup> Calvin also emphasizes singlemindedness in explaining scriptures that speak of God’s desire for a pure heart rather than sacrifices. Such passages teach not that God repudiates the law itself, for it is indeed good, but that God detests law-keeping born of hypocrisy and not “a true fear of his name.”<sup>272</sup> Only those who obey the law with a singular desire to please God perform works that are considered good and acceptable to him.<sup>273</sup>

Calvin is quick, however, to acknowledge that even the best of human works are tainted by sin. Thus, humans are unable to please God with their works unless they have been justified by faith.<sup>274</sup> In subsequent sections and chapters, Calvin expounds his doctrine of double justification, stating that believers’ works are considered good ultimately because God overlooks their blemishes and accepts them in Christ as if they were perfect. Yet Calvin’s qualifications do not negate his refrain that believers’ works are considered good, especially in contrast to unbelievers’ works, because they flow from a genuine desire to please God, which exists only because of regeneration.

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<sup>269</sup> *Inst.* 3.7.7 (1539), *OS* 4:157. See Haas, *Equity in Calvin’s Ethics*, 51, who states that equity “is first and foremost a virtue within the hearts of believers.” Cf. Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 249.

<sup>270</sup> *Inst.* 3.6.5 (1539), *OS* 4:150.

<sup>271</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.3 (1539,1543), *OS* 4:222.

<sup>272</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.8 (1539), *OS* 4:227.

<sup>273</sup> Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 249-250 (cf. 216).

<sup>274</sup> *Inst.* 3.14.8 (1539), *OS* 4:227.

Further, sincere love of God is requisite for true worship.<sup>275</sup> Calvin writes, “None can really call upon God save those who fear and worship Him aright with a pure heart.”<sup>276</sup> Additionally, “True prayer can never be without understanding and affection.”<sup>277</sup> Indeed, prayers “conceived only by the tongue, will be vain and worthless.”<sup>277</sup> The efficacy of prayer depends upon not just the object of prayer, but also the presence of *fides* and *timor Dei*. Moreover, obedience to the second table is possible only if one’s heart has been regenerated.<sup>278</sup>

That Calvin believes sincerity of heart is integral to law-keeping is seen perhaps most clearly in his understanding of the command against covetousness, which he asserts contains a principle that extends to the preceding commands.<sup>279</sup> Because the Lawgiver is spiritual, “inward purity of the heart is everywhere required.” While this is implied in the previous commands, God gives a separate command “to stimulate [the Israelites] more sharply, and to press them more closely.”<sup>280</sup> God desires that we not only abstain from wrong, but also perform what he had previously commanded with sincere affection of the soul.<sup>281</sup> Further, God established his law “not only to curb outward acts, but also [to] correct the affections of the mind.”<sup>282</sup> The final command requires “such strict integrity that our hearts are not to admit any perverse desires by which they may be stimulated to sin.”<sup>283</sup> This is why fulfilling the law is only hypothetical. The law demands perfection in both our outward actions and our desires and intentions. Because our natural faculties have been corrupted by sin, we cannot satisfy the law’s demands. But this does not mean that believers are unable to obey the law in a relative manner. Indeed, “two classes of men” exist. The first is “he who is not yet regenerated” and thus “not fit to begin the least iota of the law.”<sup>284</sup> The second is

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<sup>275</sup> See *Comm. Deut. 5:9*, *CO* 24:379. Cf. Beeke, “Calvin on Piety,” 144; Wright, *Calvin’s Salvation*, 249.

<sup>276</sup> *Comm. 1 John 3:22*, *COR II/XX*:201.

<sup>277</sup> 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:71, *OS* 2:115. On the necessity of affection in prayer, see Beeke, “Calvin on Piety,” 140; Richard, *Spirituality of John Calvin*, 121; Zachman, *Image and Word*, 348-352.

<sup>278</sup> See *Comm. 1 John 3:14*, *COR II/XX*:196.

<sup>279</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:17*, 24:717. Melancthon, *Romans* 15,158, *CR* 15:500,650, also implies that inner obedience is integral to true law-keeping.

<sup>280</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:17*, *CO* 24:718.

<sup>281</sup> *Comm. Ex. 20:17*, *CO* 24:719.

<sup>282</sup> 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:66, *OS* 2:109.

<sup>283</sup> 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:67, *OS* 2:109.

<sup>284</sup> 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:68, *OS* 2:111.

believers, who are trained by the law to seek salvation only in Christ. Yet the law also “urges them to seek strength from the Lord.”<sup>285</sup> The law not only shows us our inability and curbs our wickedness; it shows “the mark at which we ought to aim, the goal towards which we ought to press, that each of us, according to the measure of grace bestowed upon him, may endeavor to frame his life according to the highest rectitude, and, by constant study, continually advance more and more.”<sup>286</sup> Grace enables believers to desire, pursue, and perform what God commands, though imperfectly. And while their desires and ability are always mixed with imperfection, God graciously accepts their works as good/righteous.

## 5.5. Conclusion

While it is impossible to establish a full account of Calvin’s teaching on the content of good works, we have discovered that he sees good works as deeds congruous with law-keeping. The Christian life is summarized in the two tables of the law, which promote love for God and neighbor—*pietas/sanctitas* and *iustitia/caritas*. Further, while Calvin frequently distinguishes *pietas/sanctitas* from *iustitia/caritas*, the former referring to the first table and the latter to the second, he occasionally uses *iustitia* in reference to the whole law.<sup>287</sup> The deeds by which one is considered righteous, along the lines we have argued in previous chapters, are presented in the Decalogue.

This does not mean, however, that Calvin gives equal significance to each table. Obedience to the first table takes priority, as worship is humanity’s chief goal, and observance of the second must flow from it. Even though Calvin distinguishes the two tables and prioritizes the first, he asserts that they are inseparable and that observing the second is a way to worship God. This further reinforces what was argued in chapter 4—that good works prove the existence of faith. Neighborly love, therefore, is a means whereby believers are considered righteous and testify before God and others that they are such.

We have also discovered that love for God and others is not merely sentimental. While the love that God requires necessarily includes genuine affection, that feeling of love necessarily manifests itself in external actions. And these actions are more than restraint from evildoing. For Calvin, the Christian life is just as much about performing the duties of *pietas/sanctitas* and *iustitia/caritas* as it is refraining from evil. Therefore,

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<sup>285</sup> 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:69, OS 2:111-112.

<sup>286</sup> 1545 *Catechism in Tracts* 2:69, OS 2:112.

<sup>287</sup> See n.17 above.

the content of good works, or those deeds by which one is considered righteous, is active love for God and neighbor.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

Since we have covered much ground in this study, I will briefly summarize our findings. Afterward, I will comment on interpretive issues raised in chapter 1 and then offer some concluding remarks.

#### 6.1. Summary

In chapter 1, we surveyed literature on Calvin's theology in general and his understanding of the *duplex gratia* to highlight whether he successfully relates certain theological themes that seem incompatible. While many scholars agree that Calvin successfully relates justification and sanctification, debate abounds over the precise role he ascribes to good works in the lives of believers. We set the stage for our discussion of whether Calvin indeed espouses a positive notion of works-righteousness and, if he does, how it relates to his understanding of faith-righteousness.

In chapter 2, we laid groundwork for retrieving Calvin's positive notion of works-righteousness by tracing the trajectory of his anthropology. Calvin teaches that original humanity was created with the ability to obey God's commands and attain eternal bliss. The ability to do so, however, did not reside in themselves. The first humans lived in a state of communion with God, the source of life and adventitious gifts. These adventitious gifts regulated the natural ones (mind and will), enabling them to obey God and deepen their union with him. Yet when the first humans alienated themselves from God by disbelieving him, the adventitious gifts were withdrawn and their entire nature was corrupted. Separated from God, humans are incapable of satisfying God's law and proving themselves righteous in his sight. To be saved from their misery, they must look outside themselves to the one who has fulfilled all righteousness on their behalf. Only in Christ are humans restored to God's favor and renewed in nature. This restoration and healing is received in the *duplex gratia* of justification and sanctification, which are communicated to believers by Spirit-created faith-union with Christ. While justification is a forensic act whereby believers are declared righteous on account of Christ's merits, sanctification is the gradual process whereby they are made righteous by the indwelling Spirit. They are able once again to desire, pursue, and perform righteousness, though imperfectly, because the adventitious gifts have been restored to them in Christ by the Spirit.

In chapter 3, we analyzed more closely Calvin's understanding of believers'

ability to perform righteousness and to what extent their works relate to divine acceptance. Although regenerate humans can perform righteous deeds, even their best works are tainted by sin. For their works to be accepted as wholly righteous, God must pardon them. Because God accounts believers' imperfect good works as perfectly righteous in Christ, their works are considered righteous just as their persons are. Calvin even states that God accepts believers themselves on account of their works, but ultimately because of his gratuitous mercy. Works-righteousness, then, is not simply hypothetical for Calvin. We confirmed what Coxhead has argued: Calvin understands righteousness not simply as *absolute* righteousness; he also teaches a *partial* or *relative* righteousness as covenant obedience. Further, God takes into account this righteousness when he justifies the believer after initially receiving her into his favor. Calvin, therefore, teaches a form of justification by works, as Coxhead and Lane have argued.

In chapter 4, we discovered that Calvin ascribes soteriological value to believers' (imperfect) righteous deeds. This value, however, is incongruous with the inherent worth of works. Because believers' works are imperfect, they are worthless *in se* and do not possess value of themselves. Yet God graciously pardons the imperfections of believers' works and ascribes value to them so they may be useful in believers' lives. God freely wills to use works positively in the lives of the faithful. Good works are intimately connected to the promotion of personal holiness and righteousness; are a means whereby believers fellowship with God, the righteous one; strengthen believers' confidence that they are righteous, both situationally and experientially; are a basis for rewards, which are given only to cultivators of righteousness; and are a means whereby believers are led into eternal life, the promised reward for those who live righteously.

Chapter 5 demonstrated that Calvin understands "good works" to be obedience to the moral law, which instructs us in righteous living. The Christian life is summarized in the two tables of the Decalogue, which promote love for God and neighbor. Thus, the deeds by which one is considered righteous, along the lines we discovered in previous chapters, are presented in the Decalogue. Obedience to the first table takes priority, since humans were created for the chief purpose of worship. Obedience to the second table, however, is not optional for believers. To truly love God, one must also love one's neighbor. The two tables are inseparable, though distinguishable, and ranked differently.

While Calvin ascribes a positive role to believers and their works in salvation, in no way is his teaching on the Christian life anthropocentric. Throughout our study, we have reinforced the resolutely theocentric nature of Calvin's understanding of salvation and the Christian life. God is the ultimate cause of salvation. Yet when empowered and

led by God to perform what pleases him, humans also act as causal agents, though in a subordinate manner. For Calvin, then, the works-righteousness of believers is not the same as self-righteousness. While God considers believers' works righteous because he has accepted them in Christ, accepts believers themselves as righteous on account of their works, and uses believers' righteous deeds positively in their soteriological experience, God is the origin of that righteousness. He has imputed Christ's righteousness to them and has imparted his Spirit to them so they may live according to his righteousness. Even though their obedience is imperfect, he accepts it as wholly righteous because they are united to Christ, the perfectly righteous one. Calvin's positive notion of works-righteousness, therefore, is subordinated to and contingent upon his notion of faith-righteousness.

## 6.2. Integrating Works-Righteousness and Faith-Righteousness

Recalling our discussion in chapter 1, certain interpreters have suggested that Calvin does not successfully relate certain themes that seem logically incompatible, such as justification and sanctification. Even among those who believe that he does successfully relate such themes, not all agree on the exact role that Calvin ascribes to believers' good works. Some questions we posed at the outset are what relation Calvin ascribes to works-righteousness and faith-righteousness, and to what extent he views the former positively. It is clear from our study that Calvin attempts to relate the two and that he does not simply contrast works-righteousness with faith-righteousness so that the former is *always* rejected. While he acknowledges in his Ezekiel lectures that scriptural teachings on works-righteousness present difficulties for the doctrine of justification *sola fide*, he also asserts that such passages are not irreconcilable with those that teach faith-righteousness. And in the *Institutio*, he teaches not only that one *can* reconcile passages that speak of faith-righteousness and those that speak of works-righteousness, but that one can do so only by recognizing "a double acceptance of man before God."<sup>1</sup> The more important question, therefore, is not *whether* Calvin seeks to reconcile the two ideas, but *how* he attempts to do so.

Calvin attempts to relate the two themes—and other themes—by means of subordination.<sup>2</sup> Believers are considered righteous by works only because they themselves and their works have been previously (logically and apparently

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<sup>1</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.4 (1539), *OS* 4:256.

<sup>2</sup> We have thus confirmed Coxhead, "Works Righteousness;" idem., "Justification by Works;" Lillback, *Binding of God*, 188-189, 205.



chronologically) accounted righteous by God on account of faith in Christ. Works-righteousness is possible only within the context of faith-righteousness.<sup>3</sup> When it comes to recognizing Scripture passages that speak of faith-righteousness and others that speak of works-righteousness, Calvin seems to achieve what Jeremy Treat has identified as “expansive particularity,” avoiding “either/or” reductionism, in which one is forced to choose between two biblical truths and thus reduces “the fullness of truth . . . to a fraction of reality,” and “both/and” homogeneity, in which one seeks to “uphold diversity” but “at the expense of order and integration.”<sup>4</sup>

Calvin’s theology is *expansive* because it aims to embrace “the sum of religion in all its parts” and establish formulations by taking into account all of Scripture.<sup>5</sup> For our present study, this means that Calvin recognizes both faith-righteousness and works-righteousness in Scripture and seeks to integrate both into his theological enterprise. Yet his theology is also *particular*, Treat argues, because it aims to make “distinctions without divisions.”<sup>6</sup> We have seen that Calvin makes such distinctions without divisions in his treatment of not only justification and sanctification, which Treat highlights, but also faith-righteousness and works-righteousness, and sundry related themes. Calvin does not simply use works-righteousness as a foil for faith-righteousness. In the context of the Christian life, the two are indeed distinct, but when the former is properly understood within the context of the latter, they are not contradictory. Though both are legitimate realities in the Christian life, works-righteousness is always subordinate to and contingent upon the other.

Thus, Treat’s proposition is further confirmed by our analyses: Calvin avoids either/or reductionism and both/and homogeneity by using “both theological integration and rank.”<sup>7</sup> “Theological integration,” Treat explains, “means that Calvin is able to connect the particulars to one another within the broader whole by articulating how they relate theologically.”<sup>8</sup> Calvin integrates works-righteousness and faith-righteousness

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<sup>3</sup> See Coxhead, “Justification by Works,” 11.

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy R. Treat, “Expansive Particularity: Calvin’s Way of Avoiding ‘Either/Or’ Reductionism and ‘Both/And’ Homogeneity,” *TRINJ* 34NS (2013): 45-46.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 47; “To the Reader” in *Inst.* vol.1, p.4 (1539), *OS* 3:6.

<sup>6</sup> Treat, “Expansive Particularity,” 48. Cf. Henri Blocher, “The Atonement in John Calvin’s Theology,” in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical & Practical Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Roger Nicole*, eds. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004), 282, quoted in Treat (48), who states that Calvin has an “eye for solidarities and clear-cut distinctions.”

<sup>7</sup> Treat, “Expansive Particularity,” 47.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

first because he finds both in Scripture. Moreover, both are related because Calvin believes Scripture teaches that God has reversed the twofold effect of the fall (our guilt and corruption) with the twofold grace given in Christ (justification and sanctification). God is not content to simply give believers a new status—reckoning them as righteous *situationally*. He also wants to redeem their nature—to make them righteous *experientially*. Only the righteous are accepted by God and welcomed into his celestial kingdom. Our redemption, however, could never come about by our own works or merits. This is why Calvin adamantly rejects the notion of works-righteousness *outside* the context of Spirit-created faith-union with Christ. To apprehend Christ’s benefits, one must distrust oneself and look to the promises of God in Christ. Both imputed and imparted righteousness are apprehended by faith. Yet *within* the context wherein faith-righteousness has already been established, Calvin affirms the works-righteousness of believers. Because God has justified and regenerated those united to Christ, and because he has pardoned their imperfect good works, he accepts believers on account of their works.

Just as important as *the fact that* Calvin integrates these two themes is *how* he integrates them: by way of theological rank. As Treat explains, “Within the broader framework of ‘the whole counsel of God’ (Act 20:27), Jesus’ ‘seek first’ (Matt 6:33) and Paul’s ‘of first importance’ (1 Cor 15:3) imply that there are certain doctrines that have more theological significance than others.”<sup>9</sup> Calvin certainly believes that some doctrines are more significant than others.<sup>10</sup> When considering the order of the Ten Words, for example, Calvin deduces that religion toward God takes priority over works of charity/justice. He also states that true piety depends upon correct doctrine, not in every minutia but in the particulars of religion, which are captured in the apostolic creed.<sup>11</sup> As Martin Klauber remarks, Calvin believes that “Christ himself was the foundation for the fundamental articles.”<sup>12</sup> Calvin writes, “The fundamental doctrine,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 51. Treat notes that “such an argument, of course, is not being made on these two texts alone, as if to ignore the broader witness of Scripture and its occasional nature” (n.28).

<sup>10</sup> Treat, “Expansive Particularity,” 51, states that Calvin appreciated theological ranking reflected in classifications such as *articuli fundamentales*, *articuli fundamentales secundarii*, and *articuli non-fundamentales* (see Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985], 45-46). Treat notes that these distinctions were formulated by Lutheran scholastics, yet his main point is accurate: Calvin recognized that certain doctrines rank higher than others.

<sup>11</sup> *Inst.* 4.1.12 (1539), *OS* 5:16.

<sup>12</sup> Martin I. Klauber, “Calvin on Fundamental Articles and Ecclesiastical Union,” *WTJ* 54 (1992): 342.

which it is forbidden to overthrow, is that we might learn Christ. For Christ is the only foundation of the Church.”<sup>13</sup> Calvin also advocates for “distinguishing between fundamental and nonfundamental doctrines” when establishing ecclesial unity, Klauber explains. “The fundamentals would be those doctrines that are necessary for salvation. One should consciously separate from those who explicitly deny such beliefs. However, one could disagree on nonfundamentals without risking separation.”<sup>14</sup> For Calvin, pure preaching and hearing of God’s Word and right administration of the sacraments are fundamental issues, and for this reason he had no trouble breaking with Rome.<sup>15</sup>

Yet Calvin did not rank doctrines only to determine the marks of true piety and of the true church. He also ranked doctrines in order to integrate seemingly contrary teachings in Scripture. This much is clear when Calvin explains how one must reconcile passages teaching faith-righteousness and those teaching works-righteousness. He teaches that the former take priority and set forth a principle by which all other data in Scripture must be regulated: “not one syllable of Scripture can be cited contrary to this doctrine: God’s sole reason to receive man unto himself is that he sees him utterly lost if left to himself, but because he does not will him to be lost, he exercises his mercy in freeing him.”<sup>16</sup> It seems that dominant themes in Scripture not only establish the fundamentals of religion but also help make sense of other themes.

One question naturally arises: What criteria did Calvin use to rank doctrines, especially faith-righteousness and works-righteousness? Klauber rightly states, “Calvin did not provide a convenient list of fundamental articles outside of such general concepts as the oneness of God or the deity of Christ in order not to replace Scripture with a set of doctrinal requirements.”<sup>17</sup> Calvin ranks creedal points highest, yet also themes like faith-righteousness because he believes it is a dominant theme of the gospel. He may have also considered it a fundamental because he believes it occurs more frequently throughout Scripture. What is clear: his statement in *Institutio* 3.17.4 reveals that faith-righteousness ranks higher than works-righteousness because the thrust of Scripture prioritizes the former.

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<sup>13</sup> *Comm.* 1 Cor. 3:11, *CO* 49:354.

<sup>14</sup> Klauber, “Calvin on Fundamental Articles,” 342.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 342-344. Klauber, 342-348, also explains that while Calvin believed that a pure church must faithfully uphold the fundamentals of religion, he did not believe that it would be perfect in all its doctrine.

<sup>16</sup> *Inst.* 3.17.4 (1539), *OS* 4:257.

<sup>17</sup> Klauber, “Calvin on Fundamental Articles,” 345.

We have also seen that while Calvin “was able to emphasize particulars of greater theological significance,” Treat explains, he did so “without dismissing less important doctrines that provided their context.”<sup>18</sup> Calvin prioritizes faith-righteousness but not while dismissing works-righteousness altogether. In a certain context (wherein sinners are alienated from Christ), works-righteousness is a fiction and thus leads one to faith-righteousness because humans are unable to appease God by their works. Faith-righteousness alone pleases God. Yet in another context (wherein believers are united to Christ by the Spirit, who enables them to pursue and perform righteousness, even if imperfectly), believers are considered righteous on account of their works, properly understood. And a proper understanding of works-righteousness is built upon doctrines that rank higher than and give meaning to other doctrines: the doctrine of God and his grace always takes priority over, though not to the neglect of, human action; faith also takes priority because without it no one is justified and from it flow good works.

Calvin also offers what Battles has called a “true/false principle,” or *via media* between two false extremes,<sup>19</sup> in order to make sense of Scripture’s teaching on works-righteousness. One false extreme that Calvin opposes is the Roman Catholic view of justification by works—that believers merit God’s favor. The other is that a bare faith, devoid of works, pleases God. Calvin occupies ground somewhere in the middle of these two extremes: once believers are initially accepted by God on account of faith in Christ, God accepts believers on account of their works, not because of any inherent worth in themselves or their works but because God graciously pardons their imperfect works, which flow from Christ, to whom they are united, by the Spirit. The same principle or approach can be detected in other themes we analyzed in our study. For instance, Calvin denies that we can look to ourselves for assurance of salvation. Yet he is not willing to state that works provide no confirmation that one is saved by God. He affirms a position somewhere between these two extremes: while Christ is the primary ground for assurance, God uses believers’ good works as signs that they are his children, regenerated by his Spirit, who enables them to live holily and righteously. Moreover,

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<sup>18</sup> Treat, “Expansive Particularity,” 51.

<sup>19</sup> Ford Lewis Battles, “Calculus Fidei,” in *Calvinus ecclesiae doctor: die Referate des Congrès international de Recherches calviniennes*, ed. W.H. Neuser (Kämpen: Kok, 1978), 85-110. Battles remarks that this principle, as “nothing new in the history of theology,” was not peculiar to Calvin and was used by Erasmus, Luther, Zwingli, and others (85). Battles offers multiple examples of how Calvin rejected two false extremes and affirmed what he believed was the true, *via media* position, and I am following Battles approach here. Cf. Richard C. Gamble, “Calvin’s Theological Method: Word and Spirit, a Case Study,” in *Calviniana: Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin, Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies 10*, ed. Robert V. Schnucker (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1988), 63-75, on Calvin’s *via media* approach.

while Calvin denies that works earn salvation, he is unwilling to teach that works are totally useless in the *ordo* of salvation. Rather, God graciously ascribes value to believers' works and chooses to use them as a step to blessed immortality so that works, rightly understood, are considered an inferior cause of salvation. And considering the content of good works, Calvin avoids teaching that the Christian life is marked by only piety toward God or only charity/justice toward humans. Good works, or righteous living, consists in both, though the former takes priority and is the origin of the latter.

### 6.3. The Issue of Coherence

While we have seen that Calvin relates works-righteousness and faith-righteousness, we must ask to what extent his formulations are coherent. Jason Van Vliet and Richard Stauffer, to name a few, have cautioned readers from expecting too much from Calvin in terms of coherence, for no writer attains inner coherence perfectly.<sup>20</sup> When looking at the *Institutio* alone, we should not expect perfect coherence, even if Calvin was more satisfied with the definitive 1559 edition than with previous editions. And given that we have attempted to retrieve his positive notion of works-righteousness by looking at multiple works in addition to the *Institutio*, we can expect that not all his positive formulations of works-righteousness, and other related themes, may totally cohere. Calvin does not outline all the details of his understanding of works-righteousness in a singular *locus*. We have sought to reconstruct his positive notion of works-righteousness with raw materials, as it were, from various sources. And most of his statements on works-righteousness are usually given within more polemical contexts, as those in his theological works, where he seeks to rebut the criticisms of his opponents, or within those that often lack systematic elaboration, such as his commentaries and sermons—the latter of which are directed primarily toward theologically untrained laypeople and thus refrain from exploring certain doctrinal terrain. In chapter 3, we discovered that some of Calvin's most explicit affirmations of works-righteousness and even a form of justification by works appear in his commentaries. The reason is likely that Calvin was a committed, detailed exegete who aimed to understand Scripture on its own terms, even when some teachings presented challenges to certain Reformation concerns.<sup>21</sup> In some

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<sup>20</sup> See Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 22; Richard Stauffer, *Dieu, la Création et la Providence dans la prédication de Calvin* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1987), 201. Stauffer argues that contradictions abound in Calvin's texts regarding the *imago Dei* and warns that some who admire his intelligence are tempted to synthesize such inconsistencies.

<sup>21</sup> See Lane, "The Role of Scripture," 382.

places, Calvin is concerned primarily with presenting the plain meaning of the biblical text without providing detailed systematic elaboration. Therefore, we should not be surprised to occasionally find in Calvin a lack of coherence or precision, which we do.

For instance, when considering Calvin's statements that believers are justified by works after regeneration, and even the qualifications with which he surrounds such teachings, we find that his statements and arguments are not as precise or developed as other themes in his works. This does not mean, however, that his teaching on the matter is haphazard. He consistently grounds his notion of justification by works in his understanding of the *duplex gratia* and notion of double justification. God declares believers righteous on account of works because they have already been justified and regenerated. And it is clear from the contexts of Calvin's teachings that he does not envision justification after regeneration as meritorious. Christ's work alone has satisfied God's demands and earned us his favor. Still, given that Calvin defines justification as divine acceptance that consists in remission of sins and imputation of Christ's righteousness, does his positive formulation of justification by works imply that believer's works are a basis for pardon and imputation? One might deduce that justification after regeneration indeed consists in these, yet Calvin does not explicitly explain whether this is so. He typically describes justification by imperfect works as a divine declaration—that God declares/accepts believers as righteous on account of their works—but does not state whether it consists in non-imputation and imputation. Stated differently, while Calvin teaches that the *manner* of justification differs in the lives of believers from when they were united to Christ, he does not explicate whether the *nature* of justification is the same as when God initially received them.

Granted, he *does* state that God's pardon extends over the believer's entire life. But he does not clarify whether God takes into account believers' works when he extends to them this perpetual pardon. In fact, this would seem not to be the case. We recall that God takes into account believers' works when declaring them righteous only because he has previously overlooked the imperfections of their works. God's perpetual pardon, therefore, seems to be the reason he takes into account believers' works when he continually accepts/justifies their persons after regeneration. God justifies believers on account of their works because he has already justified their works. And this justification of works is based on faith in Christ.

Further, while Calvin *does* state that “works . . . are sometimes stated to be imputed for righteousness,”<sup>22</sup> that believers are reckoned righteous on account of their works, he does not state clearly whether Christ’s righteousness is imputed to them on account of their works. Indeed, the idea that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to believers on account of their works would seem incorrect. Calvin’s form of justification by works is grounded in his doctrine of justification of works. Works please God—and, therefore, believers are accepted by God on account of their works—because he has covered them with Christ’s perfect righteousness. Works are pleasing to God because of imputation; works do not seem to be a manner whereby God continually imputes Christ’s righteousness to believers. The nature of justification after regeneration, therefore, seems different from the nature of justification at the outset. Yet the fact Calvin does not discuss this overtly does not necessarily mean that he contradicts himself but that his teaching is underdeveloped and at times vague.<sup>23</sup>

#### 6.4. Concluding Remarks

The goal of this study has been to demonstrate that Calvin’s understanding of works-righteousness is more complex than is often recognized. He does not simply use it as a foil for faith-righteousness but understands it positively within the proper theological context. Thus, I have also attempted to show that Calvin sees human activity in salvation more positively than is sometimes reported.<sup>24</sup> Calvin teaches that believers are active in pursuing and performing righteous deeds. He teaches that the good works of believers, or obedience to God’s commands, are intimately connected to divine acceptance, their growth in holiness, the deepening of their communion with God, their assurance, rewards, and entrance into God’s eternal kingdom. By good works—which originate from the Spirit, flow from faith, and are divinely pardoned—believers are considered righteous, become increasingly righteous, and enjoy the benefits of the righteous.

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<sup>22</sup> *Comm. Rom. 4:6, COR II/XIII:83.*

<sup>23</sup> My assessment of Calvin’s affirmation of a positive formulation of justification by works reflects that of Richard A. Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 192-193, regarding Calvin’s teachings on divine will and human choice. Muller argues that while Calvin was sometimes imprecise, he was not necessarily inconsistent in his formulations.

<sup>24</sup> I am not alone in this attempt. I have built upon the work of researchers such as Raith, Garcia, Billings, et al. See chapter 2, n.16.

While I will leave it to others to critically analyze whether such teachings are faithful to Scripture, I appreciate Calvin's attempt to retain both divine and human activity in the Christian life. It is easy for Christians to emphasize one while undermining the other. Indeed, knowing how to properly relate the two is an age-old challenge. Yet Calvin is not simply interested in metaphysics. He is primarily interested in helping others love and glorify God, who alone is the author of salvation. The writings and sermons we have explored in this study are those of a pastor, one who sought to train both lay and clergy to better love God and others. Only in this light may we fully appreciate Calvin's attempt to understand Scripture's teaching on works-righteousness and its relation to faith-righteousness. Calvin wants his readers and listeners to live righteously before God and others so that *the* righteous One may be loved and glorified, and that others may more fully experience his goodness.



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